BROTHERS

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The True History of a Fight Against Odds

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BROTHERS

THE TRUE HISTORY OF A FIGHT AGAINST ODDS

BY

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

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TO ALL MEN AND WOMEN
WHO HAVE STRIVEN:
TO THE STRONG
WHO HAVE ATTAINED THEIR GOAL,
TO THE WEAK
WHO HAVE MADE THE RUNNING FOR THE STRONG,
AND IN PARTICULAR TO THOSE
WHO HAVE CONFRONTED ILL-FORTUNE, ILL-HEALTH,
AND DISAPPOINTMENT
WITH FORTITUDE AND SERENITY,
I DEDICATE THIS
BOOK

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
A DRAMA IN SUNSHINE
JOHN CHARITY
THE PROCESSION OF LIFE
LIFE AND SPORT ON THE PACIFIC SLOPE
THE SHADOWY THIRD
THE PINCH OF PROSPERITY

PREFATORY NOTE

It is likely that the brothers in this book will be recognised by some readers who may indict the good taste of revealing a secret guarded jealously during many years. To these let it be said that the brother who attained to the highest honours and dignities of his profession earnestly desired that the truth concerning certain incidents in his earlier career should be told in a biography. A desire he was constrained reluctantly to forego. The story of the Samphires satisfies adequately enough the exigencies of a peculiar case. The many are not concerned; the few will discern truth through the thin veil of fiction.

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BROTHERS

PROLOGUE

Mark Samphire clutched tightly his mother’s hand, as the big room began to fill with people. Some he knew, and these he feared: because they might speak to him, and then he would stammer, and choke, and make a piteous spectacle of himself. He wished that he were his brother, Archibald, standing on the other side of his mother, Archie, the pink-skinned and golden-haired, a tremendous fellow clad in a new sailor suit, and tolerably self-possessed, but pinker than usual, because a lady in lavender silk had hugged him and called him ”a darling.” Nobody called Mark a darling except his mother, and that only when they were

alone. The fat butler kept shouting out more names. Mrs. Corrance and Jim arrived. Mark hoped they would sit near him. Jim was his own age—a ripe seven—and a sworn friend. Lord Randolph talked to Admiral Kirtling, the funny man who made everybody laugh. Ah! Jim had pushed his way through the crowd. In a minute the two boys were whispering together, nineteen to the dozen, for Mark seldom stammered when he talked to Jim.

An older person than Mark would have seen on the faces of the assembled company an air of expectation. Big folding-doors, now shut, divided the drawing-room from the library. Upon these the eyes of the women lingered, for behind them stood mystery and—so it was reported—beauty! Meantime they chattered, talking for the most part about the house, newly built, and well named The Whim. Miss Selina Lamb, one of the Lambs from Cranberry-Orcas, who had so many relations that she was never out of half-mourning, gave information to the Dean of Westchester.

"I assure you, Mr. Dean, that it is a fact. The dear Admiral got into a fly at Westchester—he carried nothing but a white umbrella, and told the man, Thomas Pinnick, who has driven me a score of times, to take him to 'some salubrious locality.' Thomas, quite properly, drove him here across the downs. The west wind was blowing strongly, and the dear man thought he was in the chops—it is chops, isn't it?—yes, in the chops of the Channel. He gave Thomas Pinnick a sovereign, and bought this hill within the week. Now he has built this remarkable house."

The Dean smiled, admitting that the house might be described as remarkable. Bedrooms covered the ground floor; above these the sitting-rooms commanded a fine view of the pastoral county of Slowshire; at the top of the house were the kitchen and servants' offices!

"I understand," said Mr. Dean, "that food descends like manna from above, and that the common odours of leek and cabbage ascend, and are smelled of none, save perhaps the skylarks."

"You always put things so poetically," murmured Miss Lamb. "Yes, you are right. The still-room is just above the library."

"Where it should be, my dear Miss Lamb. I hope the Admiral's housekeeper wears list slippers."

Miss Lamb, sensible that the Dean was making a joke which she could not quite understand, smiled, showing large even teeth, and asked if Mr. Dean had ever met the young lady in whose honour they had gathered together. Mr. Dean had not met the young lady, but he had known, intimately, her mother. Miss Lamb blushed.

"She was charming," murmured the Dean absently, "the most fascinating creature."

The spinster sniffed her surprise, reflecting that her companion was a radical. A true blue, the bishop, for instance, would not have mentioned the mother at all. She felt it her duty to bleat a feeble protest.

”She behaved so shockingly, Mr. Dean.”

”True, true, but she was very young, Miss Lamb. Poor, pretty creature! And now—dead!”

Miss Lamb closed her thin lips, and her large, too prominent, china-blue eyes settled upon a portrait just opposite: the portrait of Colonel Kirtling, the Admiral’s elder brother, the father of the mystery behind the folding-doors, and the husband of the pretty creature who had behaved so shockingly. The picture, painted by Richmond, was not unlike the famous portrait of Lord Byron. Colonel Fred Kirtling had been one of the handsomest men in the Guards. Richmond reproduced his curling auburn hair, his short upper lip, his finely modelled nose, his round chin with a distracting (the adjective was Lady Blessington’s) dimple in it, and his ”wicked” (Lady B. again) eyes.

”Did you know Colonel Kirtling, Mr. Dean?”

”Yes. A sad scamp, Miss Lamb, a scamp when he married—at sixty!”

He began to speak of the Kirtling family. Admiral Kirtling was the fourth son of the sixteenth Lord Kirtling, of Kirtling, in the county of Cumberland, who married a Penberthy from Cornwall, an heiress with a large fortune settled upon herself and her children. The seventeenth lord inherited whatever his sire had been unable to sell: Kirtling heavily mortgaged and stripped of its huge leaden roof (gambled away at hazard) and the wild moors which encompass it. This nobleman lived and died in chronic resentment against the poverty his father had inflicted upon him. His brother succeeded, and was the father of a son whom we shall meet by and by. Fred, the third brother, who had a royal duke for a godfather, married Louise de Courcy, a beauty with French blood in her veins. It is certain that she married Fred for love and against the wishes of her parents; and it is equally certain that she left him—just four years afterwards—because she loved somebody else much better. This somebody, who happened to be a peer and a famous soldier, offered Fred such satisfaction as one gentleman, even in those latter days, might tender an injured husband. Fred, however, wrote in reply that he was under an obligation to his lordship for taking off his hands the most ungrateful hussy in the kingdom. Fred’s word, be it added, was little better than his bond (the children of Israel knew that to be worthless); and it is significant that Mrs. Kirtling’s family, both French and Irish, abused Fred to all-comers: asserting that he had deceived dozens of women in his time, and none more cruelly than his charming wife. Death shut the mouths of the gossips by carrying off both Fred and Louise within six months of the latter’s elopement.

By this time the Admiral, a bachelor of some eccentricity, had just settled

into his new house at King's Charteris, near Westchester, and was known to be averse to leaving it. Yet he had to answer the question: "Who will take care of Fred's baby?" Lady Randolph, a kinswoman, was called into council.

"Children are the devil," said the Admiral gloomily. "Think of my nymphs." (He had some beautiful china).

"This one may prove the prettiest of them all," said Lady Randolph.

"Yes, yes; father and mother the handsomest couple, even if forty years were between 'em. Well, well, I lean on you, dear lady."

Lady Randolph did not fail him. She fetched the child from town, gave the nurse, an impudent town minx, twenty-four hours' notice, and installed in her place a respectable girl, Esther Gear, out of her own village of Birr Wood.

So much, and little more, was known to the company assembled in the Admiral's drawing-room.

Presently the big folding-doors were flung open, and Lady Randolph passed through, leading by the hand little Elizabeth Kirtling. A buzz of admiration greeted Betty. She wore a delicate India muslin frock, encircled by a rose-coloured sash. Rose-coloured shoes embellished her tiny feet, and a knot of the same coloured riband glowed in her dark curls, which framed an oval face. The Admiral had told Esther Gear that he would tolerate no black, which came, he said, into people's lives soon enough. Round her neck was a string of coral beads which matched the tints of her cheeks. Her great hazel eyes shone demurely beneath their thick black lashes, and when she smiled her lips parted, revealing a fairy's set of teeth between two dimples. The Admiral met his niece on the threshold of the room, took her hand, and patted it softly. Then he led her forward. The finely proportioned saloon, filled with rare and beautiful things, the silver light of an October afternoon, the many faces—young and old alike touched and interested—served as a setting for the grizzled veteran, with his whimsical weather-beaten face seamed by a thousand lines, and the diminutive creature at his side. Mrs. Samphire let two tears trickle unheeded down her thin cheeks, but her pretty mouth was smiling. Mark felt that his mother's grasp had tightened. Perhaps she foresaw, poor lady, that the time appointed for her to leave her sons was near at hand. Mark stared hard at the little girl as if indeed—as was true—he had never seen her like.

Now it seems that the Admiral had told his niece, with a twinkle in his kind eyes, that the drawing-room was her room: the state apartment of the only lady of his house. And so, when Betty looked up and saw many strange faces about her she recalled an adjective too often in her father's mouth, and said clearly and loudly: "Uncle, what are all dese dam peoples doing in my room?"

When the laughter died down, the Admiral said with his queer chuckle: "Egad! this is a maid of surprises"; but he was careful to explain to his niece that

his friends were her friends, to be honoured and loved by her. The child's mouth puckered, and her great eyes were troubled.

"I can't love all dese peoples," she protested, on the edge of tears. The Admiral laughed.

"You must pick and choose, Betty. 'Tis the privilege of your sex. Come now, who pleases you best?"

She understood perfectly: examining the company with dignified curiosity. Finally, her eyes rested upon the three boys at Mrs. Samphire's side.

"I like dem boys," she said clearly.

The three boys were confused but charmed.

"She likes the boys, the coquette!" exclaimed the Admiral. "And which of the three, missie, do you like best?"

The boys blushed because the company stared at them. Archie, the handsome one, stood nearest to little Betty, and seeing her hesitation held out his hands; Jim Corrance smiled invitingly; Mark, the stammerer, attempted no lure, dismally conscious that he could not compete against the others, but his forget-me-not blue eyes, the only fine feature he possessed, suffused a soft radiance.

"I love him!" cried Betty, running forward. She passed Archie and Jim, flinging her arms round Mark's neck, who bashfully returned her eager kisses.

"Um!" said the Admiral, half smiling, half frowning, "as I remarked just now, here is a Maid of Surprises."

CHAPTER I

BUBBLE AND SQUEAK

This is the history of a fighter, a fighter against odds, whose weapons were forged at Harrow-on-the-Hill. Afterwards, in Mark Samphire's eyes, all school buildings, even the humblest, had a certain sanctity, because they are strewn with precious dust, the *pulverem Olympicum*, so pungent to the nostrils of a combatant. To him, for instance, the ancient Fourth Form Room at Harrow was no battered mausoleum of dead names, but a glorious Campus Martius, where Byron, Peel, and other immortal youths wrestled with their future, even as Jacob wrestled with the angel.

Mark and his friend Jim Corrance became Harrovians when they were fourteen, taking their places in the First Shell, the highest form but one open to new

boys. Archibald Samphire, their senior by eighteen months, had just reached the Upper Remove, two forms ahead of the First Shell.

The three boys travelled together from King's Charteris to London; but at Euston Mark and Jim were bundled by Archie into a first-class carriage, with instructions to sit still and not "swagger." Archie joined some swells on the platform. One of these Olympians lighted a cigar, which he smoked for a couple of minutes, throwing it away with the observation that really he must tell the dear old governor to buy better weeds.

"How do you feel, Mark?" whispered Jim.

"If I l-looked as small as I f-f-feel," said Mark, "you wouldn't be able to s-s-see me."

An hour later they stood in the schoolyard. Here "bill" was called; here yard-cricket, beloved by many generations of boys, was played; here, peering out of his cell, might be seen the rosy, clean-shaven face of old Sam, *Custos*, as the Doctor called him; that sly old Sam who sold all things pertaining to Harrow games at a preposterous profit; who prepared the rods, who was present when those rods fell hurtling upon the bare flesh—Sam of the fair, round belly, Sam of the ripe, ruby-coloured nose, who has led bishops, statesmen, field-marshals, peers and baronets, members of Parliament, members of the Bar, members of the Stock Exchange—to the BLOCK! Can it be possible that Sam has passed away? Surely not. Is he not part and parcel of the Yard? And when the Yard lies silent and deserted, when the moonbeams alone play upon it, when the school clock tolls midnight, does not the ghost of old Sam fare forth on his familiar rounds, keeping watch and ward in the ancient precincts?

From the Yard Archibald escorted Mark and Jim to Billy's, their boarding-house, where the boys found themselves joint tenants of a two-room, a piece of good fortune (for there were several three-rooms and one four-room) which they owed partly to Archie, as he was careful to inform them, and partly to the high places they had taken in the school. Long and narrow, with a door at one end and a window at the other, this room contained two battered fold-up bedsteads, two washhand-stands, two bureaux, a shabby carpet, a table, a fireplace, and three Windsor chairs. Here the boys were expected to work, to sleep, and to eat breakfast and tea. No room, according to Mark, has since given him the pleasure and pride which he derived from this. And Jim Corrance, after he had made his enormous fortune, liked to speak of the first sporting-prints which he bought and of the moth-eaten head of a red deer, a nine-pointer, found in an attic at Pitt Hall, the home of the Samphires.

This first summer half was as pleasant as any Mark spent at Harrow. He learned to swim in "Ducker," the school bathing-place, a puddle in those days, but since greatly enlarged and improved; he was taught to play cricket with a straight

bat; he lay upon the green slopes of the Sixth Form Ground and ate ices; he spent his *exeat* at Randolph House in Belgrave Square, and witnessed at "Lord's" the defeat of the Eton eleven from the top of Lord Randolph's coach, returning to Harrow with a sovereign in his pocket, pride in his heart, and heaven knows what mixture of pie and pudding and champagne in his small stomach!

At Billy's the colour, tone, and texture of the "house" were exceptionally good. Billy treated his boys as gentlemen. Some dominies play the spy, thereby turning boys into enemies instead of friends; Billy always coughed discreetly when making his rounds. And if he had reason to suspect a boy of conduct unbecoming an Harrovian, he would send for him and speak to him quietly, or perhaps, if the offender was a good fellow, ask him to breakfast or dinner, heaping food upon his plate and coals of fire upon his head. His favourite warning may be quoted: "I have had my eye on you for some time." But Mark knew, even then, that Billy's eyes were none of the best, and that often they pretended not to see much that a wise man overlooks.

The first year passed quickly. Mark and Jim found themselves in the Lower Remove at the beginning of the winter half, where they achieved the distinction of a "double," jumping over the Upper Remove into the Third Fifth, known as "Paradise," a place so pleasant that some boys refused to leave it. One could say to aunts and uncles, "Oh, I'm in the Fifth," and few were unkind enough to ask, "Which Fifth?" Here they found Archie and a friend of his, Lubber West, who in these latter days doubtless would have been superannuated, and not without cause. Archie and the Lubber practised what they called the "co-operative system of work." They would come to Mark's room and sit upon the sofa with a large gallipot of strawberry-ice between them. Then Mark and Jim were instructed to "mug up" forty lines of Euripides. This took time, and meanwhile the ice was consumed and anything else in the form of light refreshment which might be offered. When Mark was ready to construe, Archie and the Lubber produced a couple of battered books, and listened attentively enough to what Mark had to say, noting in light pencil marks unfamiliar verbs and nouns. In this way, as Archie observed, much valuable time was saved, and the lesson honourably learned. Archie had a number of "cribs," but, as elder brother, he denounced their use by Mark as immoral. "Samphire major has given us a very 'Smart'[#] translation," was one of Billy's bon mots, not original with him by any means, but accepted by his pupils as proof of wit and gentlemanlike satire.

[#] Horace was translated by Smart.

During this half, Archibald was working hard at cricket, under the kindly eyes of those famous coaches, the late Lord Bessborough and Mr. Robert Grimston. He had more than a chance of playing for the school; and accordingly he pointed out to Mark that it was the minor's duty to help his major with Greek and Latin. "If I do get my straw,"[#] he said, "you will reap your reward." This unconscious humorist was now a glorious specimen of Anglo-Saxon youth. He had crisp yellow hair, curling tightly over a round, well-proportioned head, the clear, ruddy skin which from the days of David has always commanded admiration, and a tenor voice of peculiarly fine quality. Mark was his humble and adoring slave. Now, it chanced that in a shop half-way down Harrow Hill two young women possessed of bright complexions and waspish waists served hot chocolate and buttered toast to boys coming up from the playing fields, and in particular to certain boys of Billy's. Behind the shop was a back room, into which two or three big fellows were admitted. In a certain set it became the thing to drop into Brown's at half-past four and have a lark with the girls. The girls were able to take care of themselves; the boys lost their heads. Because Archie's head was a pretty one, the girls were not particularly anxious that he should find it. During the Christmas term he and a boy from another house were in and out of Brown's half a dozen times a day, and the school wondered what would happen.

[#] The black-and-white straw hat only worn by members of the school eleven.

"I l-l-loathe those girls," said Mark; "one b-b-bubbles and one squeaks."

Billy's seized the phrase. Within a week the girls were known as Bubble and Squeak. One of the fags pinned a card to Archie's door:—

"Which do you like best: chocolate and buttered toast or Bubble and Squeak?"

"What can we do?" said Mark to Jim.

"Is it Bubble or Squeak?" Jim asked.

"I d-d-don't know or care; they're vulgar b-b-beasts. Old Archie has a lock of hair. They've given away tons of it: enough to stuff a sofa."

"They can get more from the same old place," said Jim.

"Oh, it's their own," said Mark. "I hate marmalade-coloured hair—don't you?"

It was after this brief dialogue that Jim noticed a falling off of Mark's interest in his work. For the first time a copy of Iambics deserved some of the remarks which the form-master made upon them. During the next fortnight this negligence, coupled with his stutter and a temporary deafness, sent Mark to the

bottom of his class. Jim asked for an explanation.

"It's old Archie. He's playing the devil with himself."

"Let him," said Jim, who was no altruist. "What's the good of worrying? We can't do anything."

"Perhaps we c-c-can," said Mark. "We *must*," he added.

"You have a scheme?"

Mark nodded. "I d-d-don't know w-what you'll say to it."

"I can't say anything till I hear it."

"S-suppose I give Billy a hint?"

The scheme was so alien to a boy's conception of the word "honour," such a violation of an unwritten code—in fine, such a desperate remedy—that Jim gasped.

"D-don't look like that!" said Mark sharply. "C-can't you see that I loathe it—as—you do. If m-mother were alive I'd write to her. But if I told father, he would come bellowing down, and behave like a bull in a china shop. There would be a jolly r-r-row then."

"Mark," said Jim, "Archie is big enough to look after himself."

"It's worse than you think," Mark said. "He's meeting this g-g-girl after lock-up. He gets out of the pantry window. I daresay he's squared one of the Tobies" (Toby was the generic name for footmen). "And it's frightfully r-r-risky. If he's nailed, he'll be sacked."

"What a silly old ass!" said Jim.

"He runs these frightful risks—for what? To kiss a girl who bubbles at the mouth!"

"It's the one who squeaks," Jim amended. "And she's an artful dodger. She thinks he'll marry her. All right, I'll go with you to Billy after prayers to-night."

"I'll go alone."

"You won't."

"I will."

"No."

"Yes; yes; yes."

Jim's obstinacy prevailed. After prayers, the boys waited in the passage. Jim had been swished by the Doctor in the Fourth Form Room, and his sensations before execution reproduced themselves. Mark seemed cool and collected.

"Sit down," said Billy. "Open your books."

Mark laid his Thucydides upon the table.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Billy. He had pushed up his spectacles while he was speaking. Now, he polished a pair of pince-nez and popped them on his nose. Nervousness is contagious.

"We have c-c-come here to t-t-tell you, s-sir, s-s-something which you

ought to know."

The house-master blinked, and glanced at both doors. One communicated with the passage, the other opened into the drawing-room, where his wife was playing one of Strauss's waltzes: *Wein, Weib und Gesang*. Whenever Jim heard this waltz he could conjure up a vision of that square, cosy, book-lined room, the big desk littered with papers, and behind it the burly figure of Billy, his eyes blinking interrogation. He let Mark take his own time.

"Something wrong in the house?" said Billy.

"Yes, sir."

Billy seized a quill pen, and began to bite it.

"Isn't this a serious step for you boys to take?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, sir."

His gravity became portentous. Perhaps he feared an abominable revelation.

"You both understand," he coughed nervously, "that I may be compelled to act on what you choose to tell me; and if what you have to say implicates—er—others, if others may—er—have to—er—suffer, perhaps severely," he nodded so emphatically that his pince-nez fell off, "it may be well for you to—er—in fact—to," he blew his nose violently, "to bid me—Good night."

"Not yet," said Mark firmly.

Billy's hesitation vanished.

"Go on," he said curtly. "Speak plainly, and conceal nothing."

Mark told his story. He made no mention of the pantry window, nor of the meetings after lock-up. For the rest, he spoke with a conciseness and practical common sense which filled Jim with admiration. As he was concluding, Billy began to smile.

"You are both good fellows, and I'm obliged to you. You must dine with me. I shall pull a string or two, and our—er—marionettes, mark that word; it is pat; our marionettes shall dance elsewhere."

"Not Archie?" gasped Mark.

"No. We can't spare Archibald. I undertake to handle him. Silly fellow, very silly fellow! His father and mother put a better head on your shoulders, my boy"; he tapped Mark's cheek. "And now open old Thicksides. Eh, what? you know your lesson? Then let's hear it." Jim got rather red. "I shan't put you on, Corrance, but Samphire minor and I will construe for your benefit. Fire away, Samphire minor."

The boys went back to their room to find Archie at full length on the sofa. His greeting justified Billy's sagacity in keeping Mark to construe Thucydides. "What a time you fellows have been! I suppose Billy gave you half a dozen readings. Well, let's have 'em, late though it is. I must get my remove this half."

So no suspicion was excited.

Within the week Bubble and Squeak mysteriously disappeared, and Samphire major had an interview with his house-master. What passed was not revealed at the time, but, later, Archie gave Mark some details, which are set down with the premiss that a minor canon of Westchester Cathedral is speaking, not a Fifth Form boy at Harrow.

"Do you remember those girls at Brown's?" he said. "Well, I fell in love with one of them. What? You knew it? Oh! Oh, indeed! The whole school knew it? Ah, well, Billy knew it too. Sent for me, and behaved like a gentleman. Made me blubber like a baby. I give you my word I never felt quite so cheap. It wasn't what he said, but what he left unsaid. And I promised him that I would have nothing more to do with Squeak. He told me a thing or two about her which opened my eyes; she was a baggage, but pretty, very pretty: an alluring little spider. I felt at the time I would go through fire and water to her——"

"Not to mention a pantry window," said Mark, grinning.

"You don't mean to say that you knew that too? Well, well, it might have proved an ugly scrape."

For a year after this incident, the sun shone serenely in the Samphire firmament. The brothers moved up out of Paradise, into the Second Fifth, Paradise Lost, and thence into the First Fifth, Paradise Regained, singing pæans of praise and thanksgiving. This was at the beginning of Mark's third summer half, the half when Archie made a great score at Lord's, carrying out his bat for eighty-seven runs in the first innings; the half, also, when Mark received his "cap,"[#] the night before the match wherein Billy's became cock house at cricket!

[#] The "cap" is the house cricket-cap, given to members of the house eleven.

CHAPTER II
BILLY'S *v.* BASHAN'S

During this summer half Mark and Jim built some castles, in which, as you will see, they were not called upon to live. If Fate made men dwell in the mansions of their dreams how many of us would find ourselves queerly housed? Mark's castles were military fortresses. He had the pipeclay in his marrow, whereas

Jim saw the Queen's red through his friend's spectacles. The boys studied the lives of famous captains, from Miltiades to Wellington, and at tea and breakfast would fight the world's great battles with such well-seasoned troops as chipped plates and saucers, a battered salt-cellar and pepper-pot, a glass milk-jug, and a Britannia metal teapot, which would not pour properly. India, and in particular the Indian frontier, was their battlefield: the scene of a strife such as the world has not yet witnessed; a struggle between the Slav and the Anglo-Saxon for the supremacy of the world. Mark boldly reached for a marshal's *bâton*; Jim modestly contented himself with the full pay of a general, the Victoria Cross, and a snug little crib in a good hunting country.

Sometimes Archie deigned to listen to them, but he was not encouraging in his comments.

"You, a soldier!" he would exclaim, looking at Mark's narrow chest and skinny arms; "why you'd die of fatigue in your first campaign. I advise you to be a schoolmaster."

"You have f-f-forgotten" (most boys would have said "you don't know"), "you have forgotten," Mark replied, "that Alexander was a small man; and Nelson, and Napoleon, and Wellington."

"Pooh, they were hard as nails."

That same evening Mark said: "I'm g-going to the Gym" (gymnasium) "every day, till I get hard as nails."

"Not in the summer?" Jim exclaimed.

"Yes; I'll have the place to myself—so much the better."

He worked indefatigably, and Jim was asked to feel his biceps about four times a day.

About the middle of June Jim made a discovery. High up, on one of the inside panels of his bedstead, he found the name of a gallant fellow who had fought gloriously in the Indian Mutiny.

"I'd like to sleep in his bed," said Mark.

"What a rum chap you are!" Jim exclaimed.

"If I sleep in his bed I may d-dream of him," Mark replied.

They changed beds with mutual satisfaction; for Jim's had a trick of collapsing in the middle of the night.

Later on Jim made another discovery: subjective this time. Mark was overdoing himself: working mind and muscle too hard. Never was spirit more willing, nor flesh more weak. One day, a sultry day in the middle of July, he fainted in school. That night Billy detained Jim after prayers.

"*Entre nous*, I am uneasy about Samphire minor," he said. "And as two heads are better than one I've sent for you, his friend and—er—mine. What do you suggest?"

At that moment Jim would have gone to the rack for Billy. As Jim suggested nothing, Billy continued: ”The case presents difficulties, but difficulties give an edge to life—don’t they?”

”Sometimes,” said Jim cautiously; for Billy had a trick of leading fellows on to make fools of themselves.

”Samphire minor goes too fast at his fences.”

Billy knew that any allusion to the hunting-field was not wasted on Jim.

”And the fences,” continued Billy thoughtfully, ”are rather big for Samphire minor.”

”And he won’t ride cunning,” added Jim.

”Just so. Thank you, my dear fellow; you follow me, I see. Now Samphire major, big though he is, takes advantage of the—er—gaps.”

”Rather,” said Jim.

”Humph!” Billy stroked his ample chin. Jim was reflecting that his tutor was too heavy for a first-flight man, but that in his day he must have been a thruster.

”In fine, not to put too fine a point on it, *we* must interfere.”

”Yes,” said Jim, swelling visibly.

”We must head him off, throw him out, teach him that valuable lesson, how to *reculer pour mieux sauter*.”

If Billy had a weakness (a *faible*, he would have said), it was in the use of French, which he spoke perfectly.

”Ye-es,” said Jim, not so confidently.

”Now, how would you set about it?”

”I, sir? If you please, sir, I don’t see my way, but I’ll follow your lead blindly, sir!”

Billy smiled, and polished his pince-nez.

”We shall move slow. The blind leading the blind. Both of you expect to be in the Sixth next September? Yes. Suppose—I only say suppose—suppose you were left—where you are?”

”Oh, sir!”

”Come, come, I thought Paradise Regained was the jolliest form in the school.”

”It is,” said Jim, ”but——”

”You are rather young and small for the Sixth. Why, God bless me! only the other day you were fags. Now, if I gave you my word that there would be no real loss of time, that you would fare farther and better by taking it easy, what would you say?”

”I say—all right, sir.”

”Good boy! Wise boy! Leave the rest to me! I shall see that Samphire major

goes up, which is fitting. The height will give him—er—poise, not *avoirdupois*, of which he has enough already. Samphire minor will not complain if you keep him company. Good night. *À propos*—will you and Samphire minor dine with us next Tuesday? A glass of champagne will do neither of you any harm."

Next term Mark became less angular, and some colour came into his thin cheeks. Both Jim and he played football hard in the hope of obtaining a "fez."[#] Harrow, like Eton and Winchester, has a game of football peculiarly its own, differing from "socker" in that it is lawful to give what is called "yards." A boy, for instance, dribbling the ball, may turn and kick it to one of his own side. If this manoeuvre be executed neatly, the other boy catches it and yells: "Yards!" Then the opposite side retires three yards from the spot where the ball was caught, and the catcher is given a free kick, which at a critical point of the game may prove of value. In Billy's brute force rather than finesse informed the play, a fact which had not escaped Mark's notice.

[#] Worn by members of the house football eleven.

"We lose lots of goals," said Mark to Jim, "because we try to rush 'em, instead of giving 'yards' and taking it coolly. Let's you and I practise 'yards' till we have it p-pat. Our best players f-foozle awfully."

Accordingly they bought a football and kicked it secretly and assiduously, Mark insisting that "yards" should not be given by them in the ordinary house games till they were masters of a wet, slippery ball. Then one afternoon, when Billy came down to see how his house was getting on, both boys gave "yards," in the forefront of the battle. As they panted up the hill after the game, Archibald, in the school flannels, asked if they were much the worse for wear. In giving "yards" where the advantage was greatest, they had been knocked down several times.

"You fellows played up," said the great man. "If you go on like that, I may give you a chance next Saturday."

"Thanks awfully," said Mark.

Saturday came, and with it the first of the series of house-matches. When the list went up on the old landing at the head of the rickety stairs, and when Mark's and Jim's names were seen, a howl of remonstrance was heard.

"They'll be getting babies to play next," said many whose names were not on the list.

Archibald sent for Mark and spoke a sharp word: "They accuse me of favouring, the silly fools, as if my brother wasn't the last fellow in the house

I'd think of favouring."

”I know that, Archie."

”You see," Archibald explained, ”this match with Bashan's doesn't count. We must give 'em a licking, and afterwards it will be just as easy to let you drop out, as it was to stick you in."

The school, however, were of opinion that this match might prove a surprise for Billy's. Bashan's was not a first-class team, but there were big fellows in it who had the reputation of playing a savage game. Bashan's, it was said, would sell their souls and bodies to lower Billy's pride, and Billy's would sell theirs as cheerfully rather than Bashan's should triumph. Billy's included two members of the school eleven, Archie and the Lubber; Bashan's had one, but he was reckoned the finest player of his generation.

The game began. Half the school was present, including Billy, who was known to miss many things in life, but his house-match—never! Behind the crowd of boys the austere figure of the Doctor sat erect on his brown horse.

Archie kicked off. The wind carried the ball to Bashan's top side. There a lean, long-legged, long-winded Bashanite stopped it, kicked it, and swooped after it like a lurcher after a rabbit! By virtue of his speed he shot by Billy's top-side men before they had got into their stride; in another second he had kicked the ball again—and again. It rose slowly, sailed over the head of the back—who was not quite back—and just fell between and through the goal-posts.

Bashan's bellowed itself into a frenzy. Billy's smiled coldly and critically. Archie had a vacuous expression, as of an ox stricken by a pole-axe. Mark's eyes were shining.

”We are going to have a f-fight," he said.

Within ten minutes Bashan's had kicked a second goal almost as ”flukey" as the first. Stupor spread like a London fog. Billy's was demoralised. At times bad luck paralyses mind and muscles. On such occasions the man of finer clay than his fellows seeks and finds opportunity. Mark, for instance, rose to and above this emergency. He, the smallest player on the ground, the one, physically speaking, least well equipped for the task, thrust himself into the breach between promise and performance. In the brief interval, after the second goal had been kicked, he went up to Archie and the Lubber, who were standing apart, inert and speechless.

”I s-say," stammered Mark, ”you must change your tactics."

The Lubber raised his heavy head.

”Shut up, Mark!" said Archibald.

”I won't," said Mark. ”These Bashanites haven't a chance if *you* d-d-do the right thing."

Archie scowled; but the Lubber, who had reason to respect Mark's abilities

as a scholar, growled: ”Well, what is the right thing?”

”The Bashanites are like a lot of helots, drunk with success. If we go canny, they’ll play themselves out. Then we can trample on ’em. Don’t attack a victorious enemy! Defence is our game. Pull our fellows together! Tell ’em to keep c-cool and quiet for ten minutes; close in the top sides; keep the whole eleven in front of our g-goal; forbid individual effort till you give the word!”

”By Jove! he’s right,” said the Lubber. Archie kicked off for the second time; and the Bashanites fell on the ball, kicked it hard, and charged furiously. Met by a solid phalanx, hurled back, bruised and broken—they charged again and again, panting and bellowing; but Billy’s held together. Doubtless Billy himself fathomed the plan of campaign, for when the fry of his house began to complain, when cries of ”*Follow up! Follow up!*” were heard above the yells of the Bashanites, when shrill voices screamed, ”Now’s your chance!” or, in disconsolate wail, ”Why don’t you run, you idiot!” or, in still more poignant accents, ”Good Lord! what is the matter with the fools?”—then, above these heart-breaking cries, boomed a big bass voice:

”Steady, Billy’s! Well played! Steady! Steady there!”

Within ten minutes of half-time it was plain that the enemy was exhausted. Wild eyes, heaving chests, pallid faces confronted a team full of running and brimful of hope. At the next pause Archie moved along the line. *Orders to charge.* And didn’t Billy’s charge? Didn’t every boy’s heart thrill to that whispered word? Charge? Aye, with a yell which must have echoed in the Fourth Form Room, nearly a mile away. Charge? Yes—with the fury of the Light Brigade at Balaclava! And the Bashanites bowed down before that charge like the worshippers of Baal beneath the sword of the Prophet! It was Homeric, worthy, so Billy said, of the finest traditions of the house.

One goal to two—and half-time.

While Billy’s sucked the lemons which the fry hurled at them, Jim found time to observe to Mark: ”I say, so far *we* haven’t scored.”

”N-n-not yet,” said Mark.

Bashan’s kicked off after ends had been changed. They had got their second wind, and also sound advice from their captain, a man of guile, who has since been seen and heard at Baba Wali, at Abu Klea, and at Suakin. The Bashanites herded together, bent on retaining the advantage of their one goal, not daring to risk it in pursuit of another. Once, twice, thrice, Billy’s swept up the field, to be driven back and back when within a dozen paces of the Bashanite citadel. And then, at the fourth essay, Jim’s chance came. He had the ball between his legs. ”Kick it, kick it!” screamed Billy’s. ”*Yards*,” whispered Mark. Jim turned mechanically, kicking the ball into Archie’s outstretched hands as the leading Bashanite rolled him head over heels in the mud.

A silence fell on players and onlookers. Archie took his time, eyeing anxiously the distance between himself and the goal-posts. Jim shut his eyes, which in point of fact were nearly closed already. A roar of applause from Billy's, a despairing groan from Bashan's, proclaimed the accuracy of the kick.

Two goals all, and twenty minutes to play!

The Lubber sauntered up, sucking a lemon, and stolid as usual.

"Well," said he to Mark, "what'll happen now?"

"Why they'll play up like m-mad, of course. They've everything to gain, and precious little to lose. We ought to go back to our defensive tactics. Let 'em p-pump 'emselves out, and then smash 'em."

"Good kid," said the old Lubber; "if your body was half as big as your brain, you'd be a corker."

He was seen talking to Archie; and Archie was nodding his handsome head, as if in accord. Before the ball was kicked off, word was passed round to play on the defensive. These tactics may seem elementary to the modern player, but five-and-twenty years ago football on both sides of the Atlantic was go-as-you-please—a succession of wild and unpremeditated rushes, with much brilliant individual work, but lacking in strategy and organisation.

Within a few minutes of resuming play, the Lubber stupidly interposed his ankle between a boot and the ball, forgetting that his skull was the most invulnerable part of his person, with the result that Billy's lost his services and weight when they were most needed. Archie, too, was slightly disabled and more than slightly dismayed. Bashan's pressed their advantage with vigour.

"It's all right," Mark panted.

Archie had the ball and was away, his side streaming after him. Down the field he sped, faster and faster. The biggest Bashanite met him shoulder to shoulder in full career. The Bashanite reeled over backwards; Archie hardly swerved. On and on strode that glorious figure in the violet-and-black stripes. Only one more Bashanite stood between him and the goal; but he, crafty as Ulysses, was quick to perceive what must be done. The ball rolled between him and the all-conquering Archie. He rushed forward. Archie crashed into him. The Bashanite fell, but the ball sailed towards a group of battered gladiators, who, having abandoned pursuit, were awaiting just such a piece of good fortune as now befell them.

"Get back!" yelled the fry.

Billy's got back in the nick of time, mad with disappointment. The Bashanites retreated, cursing. In a minute "Time" would be called. At this moment Mark darted out of a scrimmage dribbling the ball.

A second later he turned his back upon three big fellows who were within ten feet of him, knowing that they would meet with irresistible force on the spot

where he was standing, and knowing—who better?—-his own feebleness of bone and sinew. He turned and gave "yards."

Jim looked down.

When Jim looked up a pile of figures lay upon the wet, mud-stained grass, and the ball was in the hands of a sure and safe player. And then, as a roar of applause ascended from the throats of everybody on the ground, the word "Time" fell like a thunderbolt.

The match was over. Bashan's had tied Billy's.

But the eyes of the crowd rested on the pile in front of Bashan's goal. Three figures rose silently; the fourth lay face down in the mire. Archie touched his brother lightly.

"You're all right, old chap, aren't you?"

Mark did not answer. His arm was turned outward at a curious angle.

"Back," said Archie, as the two elevens surged forward. "Back!"

He faced them, terror-stricken, and Jim Corrance had never admired him so much nor liked him so well, because his strong voice trembled and his keen blue eyes were wet.

"Mark," he cried, kneeling down, "don't you hear me? Don't you hear me?" His voice broke. "My God!" he exclaimed, "he's dead!"

The face upturned to the chill November skies was of death's colour; the eyes stared glassily; the livid lips were parted in a grim smile heart-breaking to see. The two elevens formed a ring around the brothers and Billy, who had his fingers on Mark's pulse. Beyond this inner circle was the outer circle of spectators. One boy began to sneeze, and the silence had become so impressive that his sneeze seemed a personal affront, an unseemly violation. Archibald was crying as men cry—silently, with convulsive movements of the limbs.

Just then the school surgeon hurried up. Fortunately he was on the ground, but had retired with the Lubber to a distant bench, busy in bandaging that giant's ankle. Kneeling down, he laid his ear to the small blue-and-white striped chest.

"I can't feel any pulse," Billy growled.

The doctor's head was as that of a graven image.

"Why don't you do something?" Archibald demanded, giving expression to the unspoken entreaty of three hundred boys.

The surgeon paid no attention; he was listening for that murmur of life which would justify his doing anything.

"He is coming to," he muttered.

"He is coming to" passed from lip to lip. The school sighed with relief. The clouds above let fall a few drops of rain.

”A hurdle,” commanded the surgeon, ”and some coats!”

Billy was the first to pull off his overcoat. The surgeon touched Mark’s body in a dozen places. Mark gasped and gurgled; then he tried to sit up—and succeeded.

”Back’s all right,” said the surgeon. ”Keep quiet, my boy! You’re a little the worse for wear. There, there, shut your eyes and believe that we shall hurt you as little as possible. Your arm is broken.”

The news spread while the hurdle was being brought. Mark closed his eyes and lay back. The captain of Bashan’s stepped forward.

”May *I* help to carry the hurdle?” he said.

The biggest swells were proud to carry that hurdle! The school formed itself into two long lines; and when Mark passed through—pale, but smiling—some chord was struck, which thrilled into sound.

”*Three cheers for Samphire minor!*”

The brave shout rolled over the playing-fields and up Harrow Hill, past the Music Schools which recorded it; past the Chapel, where its subtle vibrations were enshrined; past the Yard, which gave back the glad acclaim of valour; past the Vaughan Library, startling, perhaps, some bookworm too intent upon what has been to care greatly for what is and may be; down the familiar street, where countless generations of ardent boys had hastened to work or play; on and on till it reached Billy’s—Billy’s with its hoary traditions of innumerable battles fought and won, Billy’s shabby and battered, scarred within and without, Billy’s—dear old Billy’s—where it became merged but not lost, in the whole of which every valiant word or deed or thought is an imperishable part!

CHAPTER III
WHICH CONTAINS A FORTUNE

At lock-up Billy announced that Mark’s injuries, albeit severe, were not such as to cause his friends serious anxiety. And so, when Archie came to Jim’s room with a face as long as the catalogue of ships in the *Iliad*, and when the two boys present got up and left hurriedly at his impatient nod of dismissal, you may believe that Jim’s heart began to thump and his eyes to pop out of his head with interrogation.

”I dropped in to tell you, you could get your ’fez,’” said Archie.

”Oh, thanks awfully. And—and Mark?”

”I bought one for him and sent it in. He got it after his arm was set.”

Jim’s heart warmed to the big fellow. ”I’m glad you thought of that.”

”His advice saved the match, and—and—and—” his voice had a curious quaver in it—”and it’s no good. Mark can never play footer again.”

He sat down and laid his curly head upon a Greek lexicon.

”You see,” Archie continued heavily, ”I thought Mark would step into my shoes.”

”Good Lord!” said Jim, seeing Mark’s foot. ”He’d lose himself in ’em.”

”The Lubber says he’d have made a great player, a great captain.”

”So he will—yet. Footer’s not the only game.”

”That’s true. There’s cricket.” Archie’s face brightened. ”I must push him on at that. The governor might get a ’pro’ to bowl to him during the Easter holidays. He shall, by Jove! Yes, you’re right. I was a fool not to think of that. And when he leaves there will have been three Samphires of Pitt Hall in the school eleven. I’ll go now. I’ve got to tackle a nasty bit of Æschylus. You played up like fun today. I told the Doctor you came from our part of Slowshire. He said something in Greek which I couldn’t make head or tail of; but I grinned, because I made certain it was complimentary. I say—don’t be in too much of a hurry to get into the Sixth. A fellow can’t work and play too. And I didn’t come to Harrow to be killed by Greek tragedians. By-the-by, if you could go down and give the old Lubber a ’con,’ he’d be grateful. He’d come up, as usual, only he doesn’t want to climb these stairs. Good night. We’re to see Mark to-morrow, if he has a decent sleep.”

After Archie had left the room, Jim rose to go downstairs to the Lubber, and in rising his eye caught a picture of Mark’s mother, which hung to the right of the head of the nine-pointer. On the other side was a picture of the Squire, a capital portrait of that fine specimen of the country gentleman. From time immemorial the owners of Pitt Hall had sought wives in Slowshire; but Mark’s father went a-wooing in London and married a delicate creature of sensibility, refinement, and culture, the daughter of an eloquent and impecunious member of Parliament, a friend of Cobden and Bright, with some of Sheridan’s wild blood in his veins, tempered, however, by a tincture of John Wesley’s. This lady bore her husband three sons: George, cut to the old Samphire pattern (whose fortunes do not concern us), Archibald, and Mark, the stammerer. Then she died, and in due time the Squire of Pitt Hall married again, selecting Miss Selina Lamb, of Cranberry-Orcas, of whom mention has been made.

Jim stared at both portraits, seeing dimly the gulf between husband and wife, realising that Mark was his mother’s child, even as Archie was as truly the son of his burly father. Mrs. Samphire’s pathetic eyes seemed to pierce his heart, so poignant was the reflection that the mother’s fine qualities of head and heart

had been reproduced faithfully, and with them her infirmity of body. Then he blundered out into the dimly lit passage and stumbled against Nixon minimus going to supper, although he was as full of tea and potted meat, and hot buttered toast, and strawberry jam as a Fourth Form boy could be.

"I say," whined Nixon minimus, "I wish you'd look and see whom you're shovin' into."

"I am looking," said Jim. "Unless I'm vastly mistaken, I heard you say to me this afternoon: 'Why don't you run, you silly fool?' I'm going to answer that question now. I didn't run because I was playing to orders. Later, when I was lying flat on my back, with the wind squeezed out of me, you specially urged me to get up and play up. Yes, you didn't mean it, of course, but I happen to want to kick somebody, and I'm going to kick you, you spoiled infant, you! Take that, and that!"

Jim went on his way relieved in mind and uplifted. The Lubber welcomed him warmly, looking very funny, with his swollen foot in a footbath and a huge piece of sticking-plaster across his nose. On his lap lay a battered volume of Livy and a crib.

"I can give you a rare good pie," he said; "if you're hungry, stick your nose into that cupboard!"

Jim declined this hospitable offer, and picked up the Livy.

"These cribs aren't much help," growled the Lubber. "It's the verbs and idioms that flummux me. Eh? What? Oh, done it before! Bless you—a dozen times; but my memory is rotten. As Billy said in pupil-room last week, 'You'll forget your own name some day. West, and sign it North.' Rather bad form making puns on a fellow's name. By gad! I'm glad you came. No, hang the 'con'! I'll chance it. I want to have a yarn with you about the Kid. Awful—wasn't it? And Archie says he won't be allowed to play footer again. Old Archie has taken it hard. Not a bad chap, Archie, but a bit stodgy—like me. It's on my mind that I've had a hand in the overdoin' of the Kid. He's a corker is the Kid. I must be blind as a bat, not to have found that out before. But he must go slow, or he'll break down. Now it wouldn't surprise me if the Kid made a mark. What? A joke? Not I. Never made one in my life—except by accident. I mean he'll turn over some big things some day."

"He seems to have turned over some big things to-day. The three Bashanites weren't small."

The Lubber laughed.

"To relieve your mind," Jim continued, "I don't mind telling you that Billy has his eye on the Kid. He won't break down in his training."

The Lubber accepted this assurance with the faith of a child; then he looked at the cupboard.

”I think,” said he, ”that if you don’t mind hauling out that pie, I’ll have a go at it. Somehow, I couldn’t tackle my tea. You’ll have some too, eh? That’s right. I never feel quite myself when my tummy’s empty.”

Next day, after dinner, Archie saw Mark. He was in bed, and above the bed hung his ”fez,” placed there by the matron. Archibald tiptoed into the room, feeling rather uncomfortable. Mark, he feared, would be miserable. To his surprise, he was greeted with a grin.

”You don’t care——”

”I’ve thought it out—with Billy. He was here before dinner. I slept like a t-top last night, and when Billy came in I read his face. He was awfully d-decent. It’s a pity he has only a daughter, although, perhaps, that makes him extra nice to the sons of other people. He said that I was strong enough to know the truth. And the truth is that footer isn’t my game. Well—I knew it. But I wanted to get my ’fez,’ and—and there it hangs, and there is this. Billy must have had it engraved the f-first thing this morning.”

He put his hand under his pillow, and pulled out a small hunting-flask. Upon it was inscribed his name, and beneath, in small script, the line from Horace:

”*Palmam qui meruit ferat.*”

”He gave me this,” said Mark, ”and with it a jolly good jaw. He m-made me see that w-w-weakness is part of my kit, and the w-weak make the running for the strong; and it’s no use messin’ about and trying to do what others can do much better. And he s-said that a fellow who rebelled and sulked was a silly ass—and—by Jove!—he’s r-right!”

Mark recovered quickly, and was treated as an honoured guest by his kind hostess, who played and sang to him every day. Boys, particularly English boys, are not taught to express their gratitude in happy phrases, but perhaps it is none the less on that account. If the lady who played Strauss’s waltzes to Mark Samphire should chance to read these lines, let her believe that the memory of her kindness has ripened with the passing years.

After the Christmas holidays Mark and Jim found themselves in the Sixth, privileged to ”fag,” and accepted by Billy’s as Olympians. It was a pleasant half, and at the end of it Archibald won the school mile. Mark trained him. Most of the boys who trained, trained too hard; and here again Mark’s weakness developed his brother’s strength: they took their ”runs” slowly, but regularly. During these spring afternoons more than fresh air was imbibed. Mark had capacity for absorbing information about places and people. To him an ordinary cottage was a volume of romance; a man asleep by the roadside quickened speculation; a travelling van held inexhaustible material. One day they came upon an encampment of gipsies. Mark insisted upon stopping to speak to an onyx-eyed urchin,

who asked for coppers, and while they were talking a handsome girl of sixteen lounged forward, addressing Mark as ”my pretty gentleman.”

”Go along with you,” said Mark. ”I’m as ugly as they make ’em.”

”You are not,” the girl replied, staring impudently into his eyes. ”Them eyes of your’n are bits of heaven’s own blue; and the women will look into them and love you.”

Mark turned scarlet.

”And you,” the hussy turned to Archie. ”Ah, you’re a real beauty, but your brother’s eyes are handsomer than your’n.”

”How do you know he’s my brother?” said Archie.

”We Romanies know many things. Give me half a crown, and I’ll tell you both a true fortune.”

”Shall we take a bob’s worth?” said Archie. ”Sixpence each?”

”I’ll read your hand for a bob,” said the girl, ”and his,” she nodded at Mark, ”for nothing.”

Archie produced a shilling. The girl took his hand between her long, slender fingers, and gazed at the lines on it.

”Well,” said a harsh voice, ”what do you see?”

An old hag, possibly the girl’s grandmother, had approached silently.

”Hullo,” said Archie, ”I suppose you’re the queen of the gipsies. Mother Shipton herself,” he added *sotto voce.*

”I’m a Stanley,” said the old woman, not without dignity. ”You’re one as looks for queens on thrones. The greatest queens, my pretty sir, don’t sit on thrones. Go on—tell his fortune! A child could read that hand and face.”

”I see a long life and a full one,” droned the girl. ”You will get what you want, because you will want it so badly.”

”A true fortune,” mumbled the old woman.

”Your turn, Mark,” said Archie. ”Hold out your paw!”

Reluctantly, Mark obeyed. The girl took his hand as she had taken Archie’s, very delicately, and smoothed the palm with a touch that was not unlike a caress. A puzzled smile curled her red lips. The old woman peered over her shoulder. Again the girl stroked the boy’s palm, and he winced.

”Shrinks from a woman’s touch,” said the old woman.

”You tell it, mother,” said the girl.

The old woman bent down.

”A happy hand,” she muttered, ”a happy hand, the hand of the free giver, the blessed hand, the kind hand, and the strong hand. Ah, but what is this? Sorrow, suffering, disappointment! And love,” her harsh voice softened: ”you will love deeply and be loved in return. You are the child of love——”

”I see more,” said the girl softly, taking Mark’s hand again. ”This is the hand

of a fighter, mother."

"Ay, so 'tis, so 'tis."

"A fighter and a conqueror."

Before Mark could draw his hand away, she had bent down and kissed it. Then she laughed and tossed her pretty head.

"He'd like a kiss on the mouth," she said, eyeing Archie saucily, "but he won't get one from me."

CHAPTER IV

MISS HAZELBY IS SHOCKED

Betty Kirtling, when a child, had been heard to say: "I like girls, but I love boys." Perhaps, beneath the smiles of the prim little English misses who came to play with her, she perceived jealousies and meanness, whereas the boys displayed hearts full of love, with no room for anything else where she was concerned. The second Mrs. Samphire maintained Betty to be a spoiled beauty before she was out of pinafores; but Lady Randolph, a finer judge of character, held the contrary opinion. The Admiral, it is true, set his niece upon a pedestal: an action of which the nurse, Esther Gear, took fair advantage. "Lor bless me, Miss Betty! what would your uncle say? You know he thinks you one of the angels," was a phrase often in her mouth, and one not to be disregarded by a child who valued the good opinion of others. "My dear," Lady Randolph would add, "you must never disappoint your uncle. If he knew you had told a fib, it would make him very unhappy." When the time came to choose a governess, she selected a lady of strong character, whose seeming severity was tempered by a sense of humour and justice. Betty hated her at first, and then learned to love her. Almost irredeemably ugly, with a square masculine head surmounting a tall, lean, awkward figure, Miriam Hazelby made the large impression of one hard to please, but for whose affection and esteem it were worth striving. Her manner, however, was repellent. The austerity of feature and deportment chilled a stranger to the marrow; her harsh voice, emphatic in denouncing humbug and vanity and luxury, only softened when she was speaking of suffering; then a quick ear might catch minor harmonies, captivating because elusive.

During the Easter holidays following the term when the Samphires met the gipsies, Mark was set upon procuring some eggs of the stonechat, which nests in

certain sheltered spots upon the Westchester downs. Mark had told Betty—now a girl of fourteen—of his proposed expedition, and she expressed an ardent wish to accompany him. Miriam Hazelby, however, permitted nothing to interfere with lessons. Betty said sorrowfully:

"I don't suppose Lanky" (her name for Miss Hazelby) "would let me go alone with you; she thinks you a young man, and I'm told twice a week that I'm a young lady. But what a splendid time we would have had!"

Next day, Mark tramped off alone, taking the lane which leads to the downs, and as he was passing the chalk-pit to the right of the village, Betty sprang into the road with a gay laugh. She carried a basket and wore an old pink linen frock.

"Betty," said Mark, "you've run away."

"Yes. Isn't it fun? Shan't I catch it from Lanky when I get back. I've lunch in this basket. Two big bits of Buszard's cake, some tartlets, sixpennorth of chocolate, four apples, and four bottles of ginger-pop. Catch hold!"

The girl was in wild spirits. It happened to be a day of late April when the sun, pouring its rays into the moist fresh earth, brings forth spring, the Aphrodite of woods and fields, with the foam of milk-white blossoms about her, and a cestus of tender green. As they passed out of the lane on to the soft turf of the downs, the landscape widened till it became panoramic. Behind lay King's Charteris encompassed by hanging woods now bursting into leaf; beyond were rolling downs, wide breezy pastures, sloping southerly and westerly to the sea, which gleamed, a thread of silver, through an opalescent haze.

"Isn't it heavenly?" Betty cried.

"It is r-r-rather jolly!"

"R-r-r-ra—ther jolly," she mimicked him to the life, rounding her shoulders and slouching forward in an attitude which Mark recognised, not without dismay, as his own; "ra—ther jolly, awfully jolly, beastly jolly. How Lanky would love to hear you."

"S-s-shut up, Betty!"

"What! You address a young lady in that manner! I must beg you"—she had caught the accent and intonation of the excellent Miriam—"to speak English. Young people, nowadays, are unintelligible. My father, in whose presence I never ventured to take a liberty with the English language, would not have believed it possible that a gentleman could use such expressions...."

Mark tried to pull her hair, but she ran like Atalanta, Mark following encumbered with the basket. Soon the business of the day began: the finding of the stonechats' nests. Presently they sat down in the shade.

"Let us have a 'beyondy' talk," said Betty.

"A what....?"

"Oh, when talk is about things we can't see, I call it 'beyondy.' I say—tell

me, what—what are your besetting sins!" Then she laughed. "We'll play 'swops.' I'll tell you my sins one by one, if you'll tell me yours. Only you must begin. It will be splendid fun, and, as Lanky says—improving. She says one ought to know oneself. I suppose you—a grand Sixth Form boy—know yourself in all your moods and tenses. Give us a lead. It would be so nice to find that you are wickeder than I."

"I am," said Mark.

"No humbug—and 'bar chaff,' as dear Lanky would not say."

"I'm v-very ambitious, Betty."

She was lying full length on the grass. Now she sat up, opening her eyes very wide.

"Are you really? Ambitious—eh? That's very interesting. I'm not ambitious, not a bit. I'm greedy." As she spoke she set her pretty teeth in an apple. "I'm greedy, and I'm fond of lying in bed. Lanky says these are awful sins. Oh, dear, I've given you two sins to one. Never mind. Lanky says a woman ought to give more than she gets. I say, eat fair with the chocolate. You big boys pretend to despise sweets, but I notice they go jolly quick when you're about. Yes; greediness and sloth. It's horrid, but it's true. You see, I'm bound to be wicked."

"Why?"

"Mother was wicked. I know it. I heard Lady Randolph say—oh, years ago—that she hoped what was bad in the Kirtlings would kill what was worse in the De Courcys. I'm not sure what she meant, and I dared not ask her, because she thought I was looking at some photographs, but it wasn't complimentary—was it?"

"No," said Mark, getting rather red.

"You are blushing," said Betty. "I do believe that you know something. What is it?"

She turned a coaxing face to his, being one of those distracting feminine creatures who have a thousand caresses distinctively their own. Her touch was different to the touch of other girls—more delicate, more subtle—an appeal to the finer, not the grosser side.

"What do you know?" she murmured.

"I c-can't tell you," Mark began bravely, and then ended with a feeble—"m-m-much."

"Boys never can tell much," said Betty disdainfully. "Go on."

"Your m-m-mother ran away."

"Is that all? Why I know more than you. Yes; she ran away. I can't think why she did, because father was so handsome. I often look at his miniature; and he must have been the most fascinating man that ever lived. Uncle calls him sometimes that 'rascal Fred.' Now what does he mean by that?"

”Betty,” said Mark desperately, ”this talk is too b-b-beyondy for me.”

She paid no attention whatsoever.

”I spoke to Lanky about it,” she continued gravely. ”She was nicer than I had ever seen her. ’Betty,’ she said, ’remember that it is not for you to judge your parents. They may not have had your advantages.’ Well, that made me think a bit, and then I hoped their sins would not be visited on me.”

”W-w-what did she say to that, Betty?”

”She nodded that long head of hers in a terrible way. ’We all suffer,’ she growled, ’for the evil that others do.’ Do *you* think I must suffer for what they did?”

”No, no,” cried Mark. ”Why, Betty, to me you are the princess who l-l-lives for ever and ever, fair and happy.”

She smiled.

”I love you when you talk like that,” she murmured. ”And—— Good gracious me!” She dashed some tears from her eyes and sprang to her feet. ”Look here, we have that long strip of gorse to do before lunch. Come on! I’ll hop you down the hill. One—two-three—OFF!”

Away she went, laughing gaily, leaving care in the shade, and Mark after her—a boy once more, but with an ache at his heart none the less.

At luncheon Betty speculated upon the nature of the punishment which awaited her, assuring Mark that she did not care a hang, revelling the more joyously in the present, because a cloud lay black upon the future.

Presently they discovered that the sun was declining into the soft haze of the western horizon.

”We must run,” cried Betty.

They ran and rested, and then ran again till they came to the sharp incline from the downs into the valley which holds the village. And here bad luck tempted them to link hands and race down a slippery, grassy slope. Perhaps Mark went too fast. Betty fell with a dismal thump, and a poignant note of anguish fluttered up from a crumpled heap of linen.

”Are you hurt, Betty?”

”I have twisted my ankle,” she groaned, her face puckering with pain.

Mark took off her boot and stocking. The ankle was already swollen and inflamed. What a catastrophe! But Betty assured him she could limp home leaning on his arm. They started very slowly and in silence. A brook bubbled in front of them, and at Mark’s advice Betty thrust her foot into the cool water.

”What a horrid ending,” sighed Betty, on the verge of tears. ”This is the punishment. Lanky will do nothing now.”

”I should think not,” said Mark indignantly. Presently he began to dry her foot with his handkerchief. It lay soft and white in his hand. She was sitting

higher up on the bank, so that she looked down upon him.

”I like you better than Archie,” she said slowly.

”W-w-why?” he stammered.

”You are so much more—sensible.”

”Sensible?”

”Yes. Archie,” she blushed faintly, ”and that stupid old Jim Corrance say they’re in love with me! Isn’t it absurd?”

Mark grew scarlet. He would have liked to say what Archie and Jim had said, but a lump in his throat made him speechless.

”I feel that you are a real friend,” pursued Betty. ”Now we must be getting home.”

They set out slowly: Betty leaning on Mark’s left arm and limping along in silence. Presently Mark became aware that she was leaning more heavily. Then he looked down upon a white, agonised face. They had just reached the small hill whereon The Whim is set. Mark wondered whether he could carry her to the summit of it. A feather-weight, this dainty creature, but Mark was no colossus like Archie. Still, exercise in the gymnasium and elsewhere had hardened his muscles. He bent down, picked her up, and breasted the hill. Her arms were round his neck; his arms held her body. But how heavy she grew with every step upward! How Mark’s back and loins and legs ached! How his heart beat! But he reached the front door and set her down. And in the twilight she held up her face and kissed him.

”Now,” she commanded, ”run home before they open the door.”

”Leave you? Not I.”

He was proof against persuasion, and simulated anger. The Admiral must hear their misadventure from his lips.

”You obstinate wretch!” said Betty.

When the Admiral did hear the story, some three minutes later, he roared with laughter, although he grew grave enough towards the end, and sent his butler, hot-foot, for the village doctor. Nor was Mark permitted to leave The Whim till that gentleman had pronounced the injury a trifling affair, which time and cold compresses would set right. At parting the Admiral admonished Mark solemnly.

”We must have no larks of this sort, my boy. What! *My* niece gallivanting about the downs with a lively young man! Miss Hazelby is inexpressibly shocked. A rod has been pickling the whole day, you may swear. And she says that you boys make love to the child. Do you?”

”I’d l-l-like to,” said Mark abjectedly, ”but I haven’t—yet.”

The Admiral paced the room slowly, as if it were a quarter-deck. His grey beard lay upon his broad chest; his red weather-beaten countenance was heavy

with thought.

”Look ye here,” said he at length. ”This is serious, and I take it seriously. I am tempted to call you a—jackanapes. As it is, I prefer to say—nothing, except this: you ought to be birched.”

”I f-feel as if you were b-b-birching me.”

His face relaxed.

”My boy, I'm sorry for you. You may not believe it, but when I was seventeen and in the Mediterranean squadron”—the Admiral's voice became reminiscent—”I had the doose of an affair. I suffered like any Romeo, and my Juliet was only eight-and—er—twenty! Well, sir, I fought and conquered, and so must you, by God!”

”I have f-f-fought, sir; and I am c-c-conquered.”

”You're glib with your tongue. I daresay Betty thinks you a tremendous fellow.”

”She thinks us—very s-s-silly.”

”Us? Miriam Hazelby was right. The little baggage! A De Courcy from tip to toe already. Well, my boy, shake hands! You've made a clean breast of it, and I respect you for that. And you're in your salad days, too. So—no more! If you choose to sigh for the moon I can't prevent you. Good night.”

Mark went home, humble as Uriah Heap. None the less, he made a tolerable dinner, and felt happy and hopeful after it. And that night he dreamed he was illustrious—a great soldier, a ruler amongst men. But, high though he climbed, aye, even to the Milky Way itself, where honours gleamed innumerable, he could not attain to the object of his dreams—the lovely Moon!

CHAPTER V
VALETE

It was now definitely decided that Archibald Samphire must go into the Church, and in due time hold the snug family living. The Squire, however, was of the opinion that Her Majesty's scarlet would mightily become his handsome second son, whereas the black of a Clerk in Orders would do well enough for Mark. Archie, to his father's surprise, chose the sable instead of the gules. Amongst the Samphires it was a tradition that the second son always became a parson. Archie had a respect amounting to veneration for tradition.

”Suit yourselves,” said the Squire of Pitt Hall to his sons. ”I should have liked to have seen Archie on a charger.”

”But what a leg for a gaiter,” said Mark, hinting at episcopal honours.

Archibald was now a very big fellow indeed, so big that when he went in to bat at Lord’s, as captain of the Harrow eleven, a small Eton boy, not far from Lord Randolph’s coach, called out shrilly: ”I say, Samphire, how’s your wife and family?” This was the famous year when Eton was beaten by five wickets, having suffered defeat during four previous summers. And the only thing that marred Archie’s triumph was the fact that Mark, despite the services of a professional during the Easter holidays, had not a place in his eleven. On the eve of the great match one vacancy remained to be filled. It became certain that either Mark or Jim Corrance would fill it. Jim has confessed since with shame that he was miserably jealous of Mark, that for a dreadful three weeks this feeling strained their friendship. And he knew that Mark was the better cricketer; more, that he had made his friend a better cricketer, that Jim’s understanding of and skill in the game were due to Mark’s precept and practice. Mark would whip a cricket-ball out of his pocket, whenever five minutes could be spared, crying, ”Come on, old chap, you muffed an easy one yesterday—*catch*!” And the ball would whizz at Jim’s toes. But during the last trial match Mark fainted from the heat, and Jim took his place in the slips. That night Archie sent for Jim.

”You can get your ’straw,’” he growled.

”But Mark——”

”Won’t take it.”

”Won’t—take—it?”

”He’s right. He hasn’t the strength. He might faint at Lord’s. We can’t run any risks.”

Jim went back to his room—confounded. Mark met him and gripped his hands.

”You’ve g-got it,” he cried. ”I *am* glad. Isn’t it glorious?”

”*Glorious?*”

Jim sat down and blubbered, like a Fourth Form boy.

However, it seemed certain then that another year would place Mark in the eleven, and also amongst the monitors, but this happy end to his Harrow career was not to be. Archibald, Jim, and he left Billy’s at the end of the Easter half. In those days it was hardly possible for a boy to pass into Sandhurst direct from a public school. Billy said that Mark could do it—at the expense of his health; for extra subjects, like geometrical drawing, English literature, history, and so forth, would have had to be learned in addition to the regular school work, which in

the Upper Sixth was as stiff as it could be.

"I'm very sorry to lose you," said Billy, when the brothers bade him good-bye. "Samphire major's future I am not concerned about. But I do worry about you, Samphire minor, because you attempt too much, you—er—so to speak—strain at the camel and swallow the gnat. Well, well," he fumbled with his glasses, "I should like to give you the benefit of my experience, but," he pursed up his lips, "I am not sanguine enough to hope that you will profit by it. Some excellent people think I take my duties too lightly. Perhaps I do, per—haps I do. A big house like this represents a force against which one individual is expected to pit his strength. But I realised long ago that what energy I could spare must of necessity prove—er—intermittent, the undisciplined, amorphous resistance would be constant. You—er—take me? Yes. So I governed myself accordingly. The great force which I was invited to control sways hither and thither, veering now to the right, and now—er—to the wrong. The swing of the pendulum, in fine. When it swings to the right I push it, so it swings a little farther; and when it swings the other way I pull behind, and perhaps it does not swing quite so far; but I don't try to stop the swing, because I know that such a feat is beyond my powers. I trust you are following me, Samphire minor. You, I fear, will recklessly expose yourself—and be rolled over, as happened in our house-match against Bashan's. There—I have warned you."

He signed to Archibald to remain behind. For a moment there was silence. Billy leaned back in his chair polishing the lenses of his pince-nez with a fine cambric handkerchief.

"If Mark had your body," he began absently, then, faintly smiling, he added: "Ah, what possibilities lie in that 'if,' which it were vain, quite vain to consider. Well, I hope that nothing will come between you and him, that your brotherly love, which has been a pleasant thing to witness, will continue to grow in strength. Mark has an extravagant affection for you—the greater because he does not wear it on his sleeve. Your success here has sweetened the bitterness of his many disappointments. You will get more from him than you give."

Archibald felt his cheek beginning to burn.

"Don't distress yourself on that account," said Billy kindly; "only take what he gives, *generously*, and so you will best help him to play his part in life."

After this interview followed the farewell supper in the common-room, with its toasts and speeches. Archie made certain that he would break down in his speech. And before the fags! He could see and hear the heartless little beasts snickering! As captain of the eleven and of the Philathletic Club, he was expected to speak about games; as a monitor, it was no less a duty to mention work. Finally he wrote out his speech and submitted it to Mark.

"Just what they'll expect," Mark observed. "You j-j-jolly well crack 'em up,

and then let 'em down a peg or two. You tell 'em what they know already—that Billy's is the best house in the school; and then you hope that it will remain so after you have left. No doubt without your moral and physical support, Billy's is likely to go to p-p-pot."

"You make me out an ass."

"Most Englishmen either grunt or bray when they get on to their legs to m-m-make a speech."

"And what are you going to say?"

"Nothing. Mum's the word for a stammerer. I shall bid 'em good-bye, that's all."

Thanks to Mark's criticism, Archie saw and seized an opportunity. He told the house he was convinced that its present prosperous condition was entirely due to his personal exertions, that he trembled for its future after he had left, that, if possible, he promised to run down from time to time for the purpose of giving advice to the Doctor, which he was sure would be appreciated—and so forth. Billy's roared with laughter, although the sneering voice of Nixon minimus was heard: "I say, he's trying to be funny!" When Archie sat down, the head of the house proposed Mark's health. The old common-room rocked with cheers. None doubted his popularity, but this deafening roar of applause lent it extraordinary significance, because such tributes were reserved for famous athletes, and for them alone.

"Thank you," he began; "thank you very much. I suppose you have believed all the p-pleasant things that the head of the house has just told you about me..." Here a dozen voices interrupted, "Yes, we do"; "He didn't lay it on thick enough"; "You're a beast to leave us," and the like. Mark continued, and in his voice there was a curious minor inflection which held attention and silence in thrall: "I am glad you believe them, although he has laid it on too thick. You see we can't get away from f-f-facts, can we? And the fact is I've been a f-f-failure." He paused. "I wanted to play in a cockhouse m-match at footer; I w-wanted to w-win a school race; and I w-w-wanted—by Jove! how b-badly I w-wanted that—I wanted my 'straw.'"

"It was offered him," said Archie.

"It was offered me," repeated Mark. "And if I'd taken it, it might have p-proved the straw which breaks the camel's back. Jim Corrance got it, and we know what back he broke—eh? The b-b-back of the Eton bowling." (A terrible din followed, during which Billy appeared, holding up a protesting hand: "My dear fellows, unless you are more careful you will destroy this ramshackle house!")

Meantime Mark had sat down, but every boy in Billy's respected his silence.

He did not wish them good-bye, because he couldn't.

CHAPTER VI
AT BURLINGTON HOUSE

You may divide the world into those who pipe and those who dance. The pipers, for the most part, envy the dancers; but many a dancer has confessed that the piper, after all, has the best of it.

Mark and Jim Corrance, at this period of their lives, were dancers to lively measures. They lived at home for a year, emancipated youths, enjoying the pleasures of Arcadia. Three times a week they rode across the grey, green downs, "that melt and fade into the distant sky," into Westchester, where a scholar of repute undertook their preparation for Sandhurst. Other days they worked at home, not too hard, and played much tennis—a new game then—and practised arts which please country maidens, amongst whom Betty Kirtling was not. For the Admiral, having no stomach for immature Romeos, sent his niece abroad (in the company of Miss Hazelby) to Dresden and Lausanne, whence letters came describing queer foreign folk with sprightliness and humour, and always ending "your most affectionate—Betty."

As the months passed, Jim became aware how strenuously Mark's heart was set on a soldier's career. One night, for instance, the young fellows were dining with the Randolphs at Birr Wood, when a famous general was present. Mark confessed himself aflame to meet the hero; and the hero, when he met Mark, became interested in him. Who shall say there is not some subtle quality, undetected by the common herd, which reveals itself to genius, because it is part, and not the least part, of genius? And you will notice that if a great man be speaking in general company, his eyes will wander here and there in search of the kindred soul, and when that is found, they wander no more. On this occasion a chance remark led the talk to India. Lord Randolph regretted that so brilliant a soldier as Hodson should have slain the Taimur princes with his own hand. The hero, who had known Hodson intimately, said that the princes had been given no assurance that their lives would be spared, and that their escape would have proved an immeasurable calamity. As he went on to speak of Nicholson and the siege of Delhi, the buzz of prattle round the big table ceased.

"He suffered excruciating pain" (the general was alluding to Nicholson),

"but not a complaint, not a sigh, leaked from his lips. During nine awful days of agony, his heroic mind fixed itself upon the needs of his country, to the very last he gave us sound and clear advice. When he died, the grim frontier chiefs, who had witnessed unmoved the most frightful atrocities, stood by his dead body with the tears streaming down their cheeks…."

"What a man!" exclaimed Mark.

"Ay," said the general. He stared at Mark, and continued, giving details of what followed the fall of Delhi: then unpublished history. The speaker had marched with the column despatched to the relief of Cawnpore. "We could only spare," said he, "seven hundred and fifty British and one thousand nine hundred native soldiers, and—let me see—how many field-guns?" He paused with his eyes still on Mark.

"Sixteen field-guns," said Mark.

"Yes, you are right. Sixteen field-guns." Then as he realised from whom he had received this piece of information, he broke into an exclamation: "God bless me! How did *you* know that?"

"I've read the d-despatches," said Mark, blushing.

After dinner the general came up to Mark and asked him if he were going to be a soldier. On Mark's eager affirmative, he said deliberately: "When you are gazetted, my boy, come to see me. I'd like to make your better acquaintance."

For a week Mark could talk of nothing save the Indian Mutiny.

"You're too keen," said Jim. "Suppose we don't pass?"

"Not p-p-pass? That's a dead certainty."

"If we did not pass——"

"We could enlist, Jim. I say, you're not going into the Service because, b-b-because I am?"

"You lit the match," Jim admitted. "A fellow must do something. Soldiering's as good as anything else."

"Ten times as good as anything else," Mark exclaimed.

Jim nodded, sensible that Mark cast a glamour over the future. As a child Jim could never listen to tales of smuggling, of hidden treasure, of Captain Kidd and the Spanish Main, without feeling a titillation of the marrow. And now that he was eighteen, with fluff on his lip, Mark could provoke this agreeable sensation whenever he pleased. That he could fire Jim was not surprising, for Jim was tinder to many sparks, but he could fire Archibald also.

"I back you to win big stakes," he would say. "W-w-what did the gipsy predict? You will g-get what you want, because you want it so badly. You've a leg for a g-g-gaiter. And your voice, your v-voice is amazing. I'd sooner hear you sing r-rot than listen to Lord Randolph talking s-sense. You must have the best of singing lessons. Why—you'll charm the b-birds off the trees."

Archie did take lessons; and began to warble at many houses ballads such as "'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay," "Sally in our Alley," and "I saw from the Beach when the Morning was Shining." He grew bigger and stronger and handsomer every day, and Mark's pride in and affection for this splendid elder brother became something of a thorn in the side of his friend Jim. Mark had an ingenuous habit of putting wise words into the mouth of this Olympian. "Old Archie," he would observe, with a beaming face, "thinks so-and-so...." Jim was sorely tempted to retort: "If old Archie thinks that, why the deuce doesn't he say it?" It was plain to Jim that Archie's brains were of a quality inferior to Mark's, but Mark would not allow this, and always waxed warm if anyone dared to speak slightingly of the colossus. Archie, for his part, returned his minor's affection, and not only sought for, but accepted graciously that minor's advice.

A year later Mark and Jim went up to London for the competitive examination, lodging at a family hotel in Down Street, an old-fashioned inn where the name of Samphire was known and respected. The Squire offered to accompany them, but Mark begged him to stay at Pitt Hall. Mark and Jim unpacked their traps, and then looked out of the window over the great world of London.

"Too much smoke for me," said Jim, seeing nothing but dun-coloured roofs and chimney-pots innumerable.

"But think of the f-f-fires," said Mark, "and of the faces round the fires. I am sure I should learn to like London, if it were not so beastly dirty. Why, there are smuts on my cuffs already."

They had a luncheon such as boys love: chops fizzing and sputtering from the gridiron, a couple of tankards of stout, a tart with Devonshire cream, and some Stilton cheese.

"Are you nervous?" said Mark.

Jim admitted a qualm or two.

"We ought to come out amongst the first twenty."

"If I am dead lag, I shall be jolly thankful," said Jim.

After lunch they took a turn down Piccadilly. Mark talked: "I say, what a glorious b-buzzing, like a swarm o' bees in June, and we're in the hive—eh?"

Presently they entered the Burlington Arcade, exchanging greetings with old school-fellows; some of them forlorn of countenance; others bubbling over with self-assurance. The Medical Board had to be passed that afternoon. Disjointed phrases flitted in and out of Mark's ear. "Not got a chance, I tell you, but it pleases my people to see me make an ass of myself—Fancy a rank outsider like that wanting to go into the Service—Yes; seventy-nine, not out—and first-class cricket—Who are those fellows with dirty collars?—If you try to crib and

get nailed, you're done—Hullo, Samphire minor! you're going to pass in first, I know—I say, I saw your aunt the other day—What dead?—And a jolly good thing, too—One of the biggest duffers in the school, I tell you—With windgalls and an awful splint—Played for the 'Varsity—And, as luck 'd have it, he hit her favourite cat——"

Outside the Arcade, they shook themselves free of the chatterers.

"I am in a beastly funk," said Jim, as they went up the stairs of Burlington House.

"Funk of what?" Mark answered impatiently.

"I don't know," Jim muttered vaguely.

They entered a long, ill-lighted room, and waited their turn. Boy after boy came out grinning, and buttoning up coat and waistcoat.

"Rather a farce this medical exam," whispered Mark; and then, as he spoke, his voice broke into a stammer: "I s-s-say—w-w-who's this?"

A fellow they had known at Harrow was coming through the great double doors. His face was white as a sheet and his lips blue. He was hurrying by, when Mark called him by name.

"They won't have me," he gasped. "I—I thought I was all right," he added piteously, "but I ain't."

"What's wrong?" said Mark.

"Heart. I asked 'em to tell me. They were rather decent, but I'm done. If you don't mind, I'll hook it now. No, don't come with me. I'm not as bad as that. Only it will, it may—grow worse."

He shambled away with the step of an old man. Mark's face was working with sympathy.

"How b-b-beastly!" he said. "And it m-m-might be one of us."

They passed through the doors into a larger room beyond. Here a score or more boys in all stages of dressing and undressing were dotting the floor. Near the window a big, burly man was testing the sight of a slender, round-shouldered youth. "How many fingers do I hold up?" Jim heard him say; and the unhappy youth replied: "Three!" The big man laughed grimly. "Wrong. Come a little nearer, and try again."

Jim was confoundedly pale.

"Pinch your cheeks," Mark whispered.

They were told to strip, and did so, but waited for some time, while the wind from an open window blew cold on their bare backs.

"Let's slip on our coats," Jim suggested.

"The others don't do it," said Mark, glancing at a row of shivering boys, "and we won't."

After what seemed an interminable interval, Jim's name was called. The

doctor into whose hands he fell made short work of him. He clapped a stethoscope to his chest and back, looked at his legs, asked a few questions, and smiled pleasantly. ”If you can see and hear, you’re all right,” said he. ”*Next!*” Jim went back to where his clothes lay in a heap on the chair. He knew that his sight and hearing were excellent; but why in the name of all that was hateful did not Mark come back? Half-way down the room Jim could see him, standing in front of a small, ferret-faced man, who was talking quickly. Now, Jim had not been asked to run round a table or to perform any other strange exercises, but Mark was treated less kindly. Jim saw him jump on and off a bench; then he began to run, and Jim caught the quick command: ”Faster, sir, faster!” And then the stethoscope was laid upon his heaving chest. Jim watched the doctor’s impassible face. Suddenly the doctor looked up and beckoned to the man who had examined Jim. The second doctor put his ear to the stethoscope.

”Catch him!” yelled Jim.

A hush fell upon the big room as Jim sprang forward, half clothed and choking with excitement. He had seen Mark quiver and reel, but the tall, thin doctor had seen it too. When Jim reached them, Mark was on his back on the big table. The ferret-faced man was smiling disagreeably, and tapping the palm of his hand with the end of his stethoscope.

”Absolutely unfit,” Jim heard him say. ”Not a surgeon in London would pass him.”

”Not pass him?” Jim said furiously. ”He’s only fainted; he’s done that before, that’s nothing.”

”Isn’t it?” said the little man drily. Then he added malevolently: ”When I am ready to receive instruction from you, young sir, I will let you know.”

When they got back to the hotel and were alone, Mark flung himself into an armchair. Presently he said quietly: ”Let’s get seats for the play”; so they walked as far as Mitchell’s in Bond Street, and bought two stalls for the *Colleen Bawn*, in which Dion Boucicault was acting. Then they strolled on to Regent’s Park. Not a word was said about what passed in Burlington House till they were crossing Portland Place, where a cousin of Mark’s had a house.

”I shan’t go back to Pitt Hall till your exam is over,” Mark said. ”I’d sooner stop up here with you.”

”I don’t care a hang about the exam now,” Jim blurted out.

”I know you don’t,” Mark replied. ”All the same, you must do your level best.”

This calmness surprised Jim. But after the play, as they were strolling home through the crowded, gas-lit streets, Mark whispered fiercely: ”I’d like to get drunk to-night.”

”Let’s do it,” said Jim.

"Good old chap! Do you think I'd let you do it?" He glanced at a handsome roysterer, who was reeling by on the arm of a girl as reckless-looking as her companion. "I can guess how *they* feel, poor devils!"

"We'll have a nightcap, anyhow," said Jim.

So they turned into one of the Piccadilly bars, full of men and women, and ablaze with light reflected from a thousand glasses and mirrors. Mark had never set foot in a London bar at midnight. The roar of the voices, interpenetrated by the shrill laughter of the women, the clinking of glasses, the swish of silk petticoats, the white glare, the overpowering odours of the liquors and perfumes, the atmosphere hot on one's cheek—these smote him. Yet the sensation of violence was not unpleasant. He was sensible that he might yell if he liked, and that no one would heed him. They edged up to the bar, squeezing through the mob till they were opposite a young woman whose plain black dress and immaculate apron were crowned by a mop of chestnut hair.

"Why it's—it's Squeak," Jim said to Mark.

She recognised them at once.

"Hullo, Mr. Samphire minor—why ain't you in bed?"

They demanded whiskies and sodas.

"You can tell that 'andsome brother of yours that I'm here," said Squeak, as she pushed the drinks across the bar.

"I'll mention it to him," said Mark.

"I want to see him, to thank him. He got me this job. Don't worry! I mean that if I'd not got the chuck from Brown's I shouldn't be 'ere, but there. I've not seen 'im. He's one of the kind that loves and runs away."

She laughed shrilly, staring with angry eyes at the young men. Her complexion had lost its freshness and delicacy; her eyes were no longer clear and bright. Mark's impassive face exasperated her.

"Tell 'im to send back all the 'air I gave 'im," she continued viciously.

"You have not quite so much left," said Mark.

"Don't look at me like that, you kid, you! I know you're thinking," she spoke very low, bending across the bar, "that I'm not any younger, or prettier, or better be'aved. Well—I ain't. And that's why I want to thank your brother."

"I shall not forget to tell him to come to see you. It will be safe enough—now."

They dropped back into the crowd. By this time Mark was able to take note of his surroundings. Squeak, so to speak, had given him bearings. The faces, in relation to hers, had a certain resemblance, as if those present belonged to the same family. Next to Jim stood an obese Israelite, puffy of face, with thick, red lips shining through an oily, black beard. Jim felt a mad impulse to kick him on the shins. Beside him was a tall, thin youth of the type known in the seventies

as the la-di-da young man. His pallid, clean-shaven face, his light-blue eyes, his closely cropped flaxen hair, his delicate features were all in striking contrast to the Jew's gross, corpulent person. The hands of each were as different as could be: the Jew's short and thick, and none too clean, with a couple of big yellow diamonds blazing on them; the youth's long and thin, very white and bony, with polished nails. And yet the pair were as twins, for the same evil spirit leered out of their eyes.

"Come on," said Mark.

Outside the air was delightfully fresh and cool, but the crowd seemed to have thickened. A tremendous human tide ebbed and flowed between the tall, dark houses. Jim's eye caught a white feather in the hat of a girl, which tossed like foam upon troubled waters. Suddenly the fascination of the scene gripped him. This was London—*London*, the city of millions; and he stood on the pavement of its most famous thoroughfare, of it and in it, whether he loved it, feared it, or hated it. And at the moment, so overpowering was the sense of something new and strange and terrible that he could not determine whether his feeling for the capital of the world was one of attraction or repulsion.

Mark and he moved slowly on, till they came to the wall which encompasses Devonshire House. At the corner stood a huge policeman, grimly impassive, one of London's hundred thousand warders, and an epitome of all.

"When is closing time?" said Mark to the constable.

"Quarter-past twelve, sir."

Mark looked at his watch.

"Five minutes more. I'm going back."

"Where?"

"To that girl—Squeak."

"What on earth for?"

"I spoke brutally. I shall beg her p-pardon. Don't come with me!"

"You're as mad as a hatter."

Jim went on to Down Street, ascended the stairs, and began to undress, thinking of two things which obliterated all others—the slender figure of Mark when it reeled back into the arms of the tall, thin surgeon, and the white feather wavering hither and thither above the turbulent crowd.

Half an hour passed, and Mark did not return. Jim grew apprehensive. If Mark had fainted—if he had fallen into coarse, gross hands such as those of the Jew. Then he thought of the colossus at the corner of Devonshire House, and took comfort in him—the Argus-eyed, the omnipresent and omnipotent.

"Not in bed yet?" said Mark.

"By Jove, here you are! I saw you trampled under foot."

"I'm glad I went back. The girl's a good sort—silly, vain, terribly ignorant,

but not without heart. I promised to see her again. It wouldn't be a b-bad bit of work to get her out of that—hell."

"You're a rum 'un," said Jim, for since they had parted Mark's face had resumed its natural expression—that look of joyousness which redeemed the harsh features and sallow skin.

"A rum 'un—why?"

"Well, I supposed, you know, that you'd be thinking just now of—of yourself."

"I'm rather s-sick of that subject."

He flung off his clothes and turned out the gas. Jim slipped into bed in the adjoining room. He couldn't sleep for an hour or two, wondering whether Mark would break down when he found himself alone, listening with ears attuned to catch the lightest sigh. To his astonishment, Mark breathed quietly and regularly. He must be—asleep! Jim waited for another ten minutes; then he slipped out of bed. The moon was throwing a soft radiance upon Mark's figure. He lay flat on his back, with his arms straight at his side. *He was smiling*! But his fists were clenched, and the jaw below the parted lips stood out firm, square, and aggressive....

Jim watched him lying thus for several minutes; then he stole back to bed—no longer a boy, but a man. By many, doubtless, the step between boyhood and manhood is taken at random, and forgotten as soon as taken; or it escapes observation altogether. But Jim was shown, as in a vision, the past and the future: the green playing-fields, the happy lanes of childhood, and beyond—the hurly-burly, the high winds and whirling dust-clouds, the inexorable struggle for and of Life!

CHAPTER VII
THE HUNT BALL

At Harrow, Mark had been told by the drawing-master that he had great talent as a draughtsman, and possibly something more. The vague "something more" kindled possibilities which smouldered, and burst into flame when the doctors at Burlington House pronounced him unfit to serve his sovereign. The Squire suggested the Bar, a bank, or a junior partnership in a brewery. Mark shook his head. Briefs—supposing they came to him—bullion, beer, left fancy cold. But to paint a great picture, to interpret by means of colour a message vital to the world,

this indeed would be worth while!

Mrs. Samphire bleated dismay and displeasure; but much to the Squire's surprise, Lady Randolph sustained Mark's choice of art as an avenue to success.

"Fame's temple," she said, "lies in the heart of a maze to which converge a thousand paths—most of 'em blind alleys. Mark may try one path after another, but in the end—in the end, mind you—he will choose the right one."

After a few months' work in South Kensington, Mark went to Paris, where he became a pupil of the famous Saphir at the École des Beaux Arts. Saphir looked at his studies and shook his head. He was of opinion that Mark had better join Julian's for a year; the standard at the Beaux Arts was very high. Mark showed his disappointment.

"Oh, monsieur, I am so anxious to be under you."

"Have you no better reason than that?" said the great man.

"Our n-n-names are alike," stammered Mark.

"*Tiens*! Any reason is better than none. *Samphire et Saphir*."

"And the l-l-less," said Mark, "includes the g-g-greater."

Saphir laughed at the compliment, and told Mark he might join his *atelier*. "Only you must work—work—work. That is my first word to you—work!"

Mark worked furiously. Many well-informed persons believe that an art student's life in Paris (particularly that part of Paris which lies on the left bank of the Seine) is a sort of carnival—a procession up and down the Boul' Mich', varied by frequent excursions to the Moulin Rouge and other places of entertainment in Montmartre. Of the unremitting labour, of the grinding poverty, of the self-denial cheerfully confronted by the greater number, an adequate idea perhaps may be gleaned from Zola's *L'OEuvre*, which sets forth, photographically and pathologically, French art life as it is. *L'OEuvre*, however, deals with the struggle for supremacy between the academic and the "*plein air*" schools. When Mark entered the Beaux Arts, this struggle, although not at an end, had become equalised, the balance of power and popularity lying rather with the *plein air* party, of which Saphir was the bright particular star. Saphir introduced Mark to Pynsent, then considered one of the rising men. Born in the East of America, related on his mother's side to two of the Brook Farm celebrities, Pynsent had renounced a promising career as a lawyer in the hope of making his fortune out West. In California he lost what money he possessed trying to develop a "salted mine." Then he "taught school" for bread and butter—a foothill school on the slopes of the Santa Lucia mountains, where the pupils were the children of squatters, and "Pikers," and greasers. Here he found his true vocation. For a couple of years he denied himself the commonest comforts, living on beans for the most part, saving his pitiful salary. Then he worked his passage round the Horn in a sailing-ship, and began at thirty years of age to draw from plaster casts!

Since, he had taken most of the prizes open to foreigners at the École des Beaux Arts!

Pynsent found Mark a lodging and studio in the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie, not far from the famous Café Procope, the café of Voltaire and Verlaine. With Pynsent as guide, he learned to know Paris—the Paris of the Valois and Bourbon, the Paris of the Terror, of the Empire, and of the Republic. Pynsent had a prodigious memory, and an absorbing passion for colour. He was always hopeful, generous, proud, inordinately ambitious, and willing to sacrifice everything to his art. He exercised an enormous influence upon Mark, making plain to him the virtue which underlies so much that is vile and vicious on the surface.

"Men fail here," said he, "not so much from incapacity as ignorance. I could not interpret Paris to you or to myself had I not served my apprenticeship in California. Because my energies were misdirected there, I have learned to direct them here. Great Cæsar's ghost! What mistakes I have made! But you can bet your life that the fellow who makes no mistakes is either a parasite or a jelly-fish. Tell me what a man's mistakes are, and I'll tell you what he is."

"Am I making a mistake?" said Mark.

He had worked—furiously, as has been said—for two years. Pynsent smoked his cigarette for a full minute before he replied: "I don't know yet. I shall know soon."

"When you do know, tell me," said Mark.

Meanwhile Archibald Samphire was occupying a corner of that famous quadrangle of Trinity College where Byron, Newton, Macaulay—and how many more?—have kept their terms. Archie was considered by impartial judges to be a distinguished young man. A "double blue," he represented his University at cricket and as a runner; he was certain to take a good degree; he could sing charmingly; he was handsome as Narcissus. At the end of the second year's work in Paris, Mark and Archie and Jim Corrance made a tour of France, with the intention of visiting the Gothic cathedrals; but, as a rule, after the dust and glare of the French roads, both Archie and Jim Corrance would seek and find some cool café. Mark, however, would hurry off to the nearest church, and return raving of foliations and triforia and clerestories—empty words to Philistines, but to him documents of surpassing interest. Archibald was going to take Orders, not swerving by a hand's breadth from his goal; but Jim, after a year at Sandhurst, had resigned his commission.

"I'm no soldier," he told Mark. "I went up for my exam because you fired me. I want to make money—a big pile." Mark said nothing, but he thought of Betty Kirtling, now eighteen, and still abroad. Jim had mentioned (with a flushed cheek) that Betty was coming out at the Westchester Hunt Ball, always held in New Year's week, and Mark had said that he would assist at that and other festivities.

When Christmas came Mark crossed the Channel. He brought Pynsent with him as a guest. Mark was now twenty-two, but he looked older. You must imagine a long, thin, sallow face, illumined by two splendid blue eyes and a wide mouth filled with white even teeth. The hair was dark brown, and the eyebrows were arched, like the eyebrows of the poet Shelley. His nose was too long—so Pynsent said—and the chin was too prominent, the eyes set too far apart, the brow too wide. For the rest the figure was tall and slight, with finely shaped extremities. Curiously enough, although ninety-nine out of a hundred persons would have pronounced Mark an ugly man; yet, dressed in petticoats, judiciously painted and bewigged, he made a captivating woman. At a dance in one of the studios, he impersonated an American heiress with so much spirit and appreciation of the attention he received, that before the night was out he had promised to become the wife of an impoverished French count: a prank provoking a challenge, which Mark accepted and which doubtless would have ended in a duel, had not Pynsent explained to the victim of the joke that if Mark was killed, the slayer of so popular a person would have to fight his friends, man by man, till not one Englishman or American was left alive in Saphir's studio. "It is the woman in Mark's face," said Pynsent, "which gives it charm and quality; but the man, strong and ardent, looks out of his eyes."

Mark did not meet Betty till the night of the Hunt Ball. He was standing beside Archie and Pynsent, as she entered the room.

"Great Scott—here's Beatrice Cenci!" said Pynsent.

The artist was thinking of the fascinating portrait which hangs in the Barberini Palace, not of the wooden counterfeit presentment so familiar to buyers of cheap chromo-lithographs.

"It's our Betty," said Archie.

"As if it could be anybody else," Mark added.

Betty advanced, tall and slim and pale: her great hazel eyes sparkling with pleasure and excitement. Beside her, beaming with pride, walked the grey-headed, grey-bearded Admiral; behind came two nice-looking youths, fingering their highly glazed Programmes and gazing at the milk-white neck and shoulders in front of them. The big room was full of people: men in the "pink" of four hunts, officers in scarlet, officers in dark green and silver, dignitaries of the Church, bland and superior; lesser luminaries, such as canons and archdeacons; masters from the college, supercilious gentlemen for the most part, and the sisters and wives and cousins of these. A roving eye might detect the difference between those of the county and those of the town, dividing the latter again into those of the barracks, the close, and the college; and a stranger might have whiled away the evening, even if he did not dance, by noting the subtler distinction between the wife of a rural dean and the mistress of a country vicarage, or between Lady

Randolph, the wife of the Lord-Lieutenant, and Lady Bellowes, whose husband was a baronet of recent creation.

The first dance had just come to an end, so the floor was comparatively clear for the passage of Betty and her squires. Archibald went forward, smiling, to greet her, followed by Mark and Jim Corrance.

"I've saved three dances apiece for you," said Betty.

One of the young men behind, Lord Kirtling's eldest son, protested loudly: "Oh, I say—and I'm a cousin."

"A cousin!" cried Betty gaily. "Why, these are my best and oldest friends. We've sucked the same acidulated drop."

Mark introduced Pynsent. Then Lord Randolph came up; and Betty was escorted in triumph to the corner sacred to the magnates, where her card was almost torn in pieces by the young men.

"Never saw such a pair," said Pynsent to Mark, indicating Archie and Betty.

Archibald, in the scarlet coat with white facings of the Quest Hunt, was standing beside Betty, who wore a pearly brocade embroidered with true lovers' knots.

"Dear old Archie looks splendid," said Mark.

A set of lancers was being formed. Mrs. Samphire, discovering that Mark had no partner, begged him to sit down beside her. The years which had passed since she married the Squire had turned her from a thin, prim, slightly acidulous spinster into a plump, smirking matron, whose skin seemed too tight for her face, even as her bodice seemed too tight for her figure. A voluble talker, she was never known to listen to any person save her superior in position or rank. Lady Randolph's lightest words she cherished and generally repeated them afterwards—as her own.

"I've hardly had time to say anything to you," she bleated. "How well Archibald looks to-night! It distresses me dreadfully to think that he will never wear pink again. Betty is very handsome. What do you say? A beauty? No, no. I can't agree with you. And I always admire blondes. All the Lambs are blondes."

"No black sheep in your family?" said Mark. Lady Randolph, who was near, smiled.

"Black sheep? Never! Dear me! Who is that? Oh, Harry Kirtling. What a nice-looking young fellow! One guesses why he is here. Our dear Admiral is anxious to see a coronet on his niece's head. Don't move, Mark! Ah! there is Lady Valence and her blind husband. Do tell me—I am so short-sighted—who is that very common young man with them? What? Oh, oh, indeed! The Duke of Brecon! I must say a word to dear Lady Valence."

She bustled across the room. Mark turned to Lady Randolph.

"Have you any m-m-mint s-sauce? There is s-something about all the

Lambs which——"

"Does not bring out our great qualities," said Lady Randolph. "See! She has put the Duke to rout, and he is going to take refuge with me."

Mark glanced up, noting that the Duke's feet were flat and turned out at an absurd angle, giving him a shuffling and awkward gait.

"He is a better fellow than he looks," whispered Lady Randolph.

"Will you do me a favour, Lady Randolph?" The Duke's voice was very pleasant. "Perhaps you can guess the nature of it?"

"An introduction to Miss Kirtling, of course."

"Of course," he repeated, laughing.

The lancers was just over, and across the room Mark could see Betty and Pynsent deep in conversation. Pynsent, he had heard women say, was a fascinating man, the more so because heretofore he had been proof against the assaults of the fair. Hullo! Lady Randolph was crossing the floor with her Duke—confound him! And now Betty was smiling at him. Yes, he had secured a dance; somebody else's probably. What an insufferable silly grin he had! Jim Corrance interrupted his thoughts.

"I say, Mark—isn't Betty a wonder?"

Jim began to rave about her. The Duke and Lady Randolph passed on; Betty leant back in her chair, while Pynsent talked. It seemed to Mark that Pynsent was making the effort of his life.

"I'm glad you brought Pynsent from Paris," Jim was saying. "It will do him good. Like all Americans who live in Paris, he is ignorant of the best side of English life. Eventually he must settle in London. And he'll paint the portraits of all the swells. He tells me that already he's in love with——"

"Betty!" exclaimed Mark.

"With my mother," said Jim, grinning.

Mark was dancing the next valse, and had to seek his partner, who—it is to be feared—did not find him as agreeable as usual. Moreover, she too prattled of Betty, of the great match she ought to make, and so forth. Fortunately a polka gave an opportunity of letting off steam. After that, and a cooling glass of cup, Mark felt more hopeful and in better humour. Indeed, by the time his dance with Betty was due, he was himself, and beginning to enjoy the ball.

"Your friend, Mr. Pynsent, is perfectly delightful," began Betty.

"I thought you found him so."

Betty smiled demurely.

"He talked in the most interesting way about——"

"Himself," said Mark.

"No."

"About you?"

”Wrong again! He talked, nearly all the time, about a dear friend of mine whom I had not seen for years.”

”I suppose you have dear friends in every town in Europe,” said Mark.

The shameless coquette nodded. How her eyes sparkled.

”And who is this dear friend Pynsent knows?”

”Mr. Pynsent was talking about—*you*,” said Betty.

”Betty, dear, forgive me! I am an ass, a silly, jealous ass. And seeing you to-night I—I——”

A kind pair of eyes warned him to say no more. For a moment there was silence. Then—they fell to talking of the old days, capping stories, and laughing at ancient jokes. When Mark left her in the hands of her next partner, he was more in love than ever, and knew that Betty knew it, and that the knowledge was not displeasing to her. And she had made plain, without words, that this meeting of friends had stirred her to the core, quickening all those generous emotions of childhood which older people are constrained sorrowfully to stifle and destroy. While Mark was sitting beside her he realised how little she had changed from the girl who had played truant on the Westchester Downs, and yet between them lay a blackthorn fence of convention and tradition.

Meantime he danced gaily every dance, and at the end of the ball got into a dogcart to drive home with Pynsent, feeling, perhaps, more alive than he had ever felt before. Pynsent offered him a cigar, and lighted one himself.

”This Hunt Ball has been a new experience,” Pynsent said, as the cart rolled up the High Street. ”And it means work. Lady Randolph has commissioned a portrait. I go on to Birr Wood after leaving you.”

”If you satisfy her, Pynsent, she can help you enormously. She knows all the right people.”

He heard Pynsent's pleasant chuckle.

”'The right people.' I always scoffed at that phrase. But I found out what it means to-night. Well, I hope to satisfy Lady Randolph. What I see I can paint. I wonder if Miss Kirtling would sit. Would you ask her?”

”Can you see her?”

”The finer lines are blurred. I might fail on that account. It would be no small thing to set on canvas the 'unexpectedness' of her face. She's going to surprise all of you before she's many years older.”

”She will marry a swell and become like everybody else,” said Mark nervously.

”A marriage of convenience! That would indeed be surprising. No, no; she is likely to marry the wrong man, but not from any ignoble motive; she is capable of a great passion, which, mind you, is more physical than mental, nine times out of ten. I'd like to make a study of her for a head of Juliet, but I should want her

to be thinking of Romeo, who, I take it, has not yet made her acquaintance."

Mark shuffled uneasily, and began to drive a willing horse too fast.

"My brother, Archie, will sit as Romeo."

"Ah! When they were standing together to-night, somehow I thought of Verona at once."

"Pynsent," said Mark desperately, "I may as well tell you that I—I l-l-love Betty Kirtling. I loved her when she was a b-baby. I loved her when she was a g-girl. And it all came back to-night. There never has been anyone else."

"Um," said Pynsent.

"Tell me frankly what's in your m-mind."

"I'm trying to fit you into it—as Romeo."

"I'm an imbecile, of course, but I f-feel like Romeo. There—it's out."

"So is your cigar. Take a pull on yourself, man, and on that horse, too! You're not an imbecile. Alps lie between you and Miss Kirtling, but the Alps have been scaled before and will be again."

"If I could paint a great picture——"

Pynsent was silent.

Mark continued keenly: "And I feel in all my bones that I shall get there, as you put it—with both feet. I say—you're not very encouraging."

"You must try for this next Salon."

No more was said. But when Mark found himself alone in the room at Pitt Hall which he always used, he lit the candles on each side of the old-fashioned mirror. Then he examined himself, frowning.

"Romeo!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "Good heavens!"

CHAPTER VIII
BARBIZON

After the Hunt Ball Betty Kirtling was whisked away on a round of visits. Jim Corrance accepted a clerkship in a big firm on the Stock Exchange. Archibald was reading hard for his degree. Mark returned to Paris and work.

Acting under Saphir's advice, he went to Barbizon with the intention of painting a picture for the Salon. In those days every man who went to Barbizon painted one picture at least in accordance with certain well-defined Barbizonian rules. At the top of the canvas was a narrow strip of sky put on boldly with

big brushes and a palette-knife. Invariably, the sky was of a tender, pinky-grey complexion, hazy, but atmospheric, hall-marked, so to speak, by Bastien Lepage. Below this strip of opalescent mist, in solid contrast, were painted the roofs of the village. These, too, were handled capitally even by the beginners. The foreground represented a field full of waving grasses, grasses from which the sun had sucked the chlorophyl, leaving them pale and attenuated. In this field grew one tree, looking much the worse for wear. Under the tree sat or stood a woman, a peasant wearing the *coiffe* of the commune and heavy sabots. This woman always had a complexion of the colour and texture of alligator-skin, and her back was bowed by excessive labour. A pretty maid waiting for her lover would have been deemed rank blasphemy against the traditions of the place where the "Angelus" of Millet had been conceived and painted.

Mark worked hard at just such a picture during half of January and the whole of February. A dozen friends were painting similar masterpieces in a fine frenzy of open-air excitement. Saphir himself was at Gretz, but he came over to Barbizon, breakfasted *chez* Siron, and examined his pupils' canvases with kindly, twinkling eyes. Then he went back to Gretz.

"He says we are all monkeys," observed a big Canadian.

"So we are," cried Mark. "We're trying to copy what one man has done s-s-superlatively well."

Later, he took the Canadian aside. Saphir had talked alone to him; and Mark had overheard his own name.

"What did he say to you about—m-m-me?"

"Oh, nothing."

"I w-want the facts."

"Well, he did ask me if you had private means, and I told him your father made you a good allowance."

"Go on!"

"And—and he said that was fortunate. Of course he meant that—er—it takes time to arrive—eh?"

"Quite so. A lifetime if you happen to choose the wrong r-road."

About the beginning of March Pynsent arrived from England.

"I've caught on," he told Mark. "I shall certainly take a studio somewhere in Kensington. Lady Randolph has found me a score of patrons. What are you doing?"

Mark produced his big canvas. Pynsent stared at it, pursing up his lower lip and frowning. Mark's hopes oozed from every pore. The picture exhibited pitiful signs of excessive labour. Pynsent obtained his best effects with bits of pure colour laid on with amazing precision. Mark's colour looked like putty.

"Are they all as ugly as that?" said Pynsent, indicating the model.

”I got the ugliest in the v-v-village. There’s a lot in her face.”

”A lot of dirt.”

”I don’t allow her to wash it. Can you read her 1-life’s history?”

”I’m hanged if I can.”

”You see n-nothing in her eyes?”

”Nor in her mouth. She’s lost all her teeth.”

”Knocked out by a b-brutal husband,” said Mark, grinning, but ill at ease beneath Pynsent’s chaff.

”What are those stains on the apron—red paint?”

”Sheep’s blood. I rubbed it on myself.”

Pynsent roared; he was not a Barbizonian.

”Great Scott! You fellows take yourselves seriously.”

”Honestly,” said Mark. ”What d’ye think of it?”

”It’s good—in streaks,” said Pynsent solemnly. Then his eyes flashed. ”Look here, Mark, they won’t hang that. But I’ve told Lady Randolph and Miss Kirtling that you will have a ’machine’ in the Salon. Now, have you the pluck to scrape this and paint it out—*to-night*?”

”Yes,” said Mark.

Next day Pynsent led the way into the forest of Fontainebleau, Mark following like a faithful spaniel. They walked for miles. Finally, Pynsent discovered a bank of cool-looking sand in the heart of a pine wood; upon the sand were wonderful shadows and reflections.

”*Voila notre affaire!*” exclaimed Pynsent.

”But the m-model——”

”I have wired to Paris. These Barbizon peasants make me tired.”

That evening the model arrived—a girl. Within twelve hours Mark was at work. Pynsent posed the girl upon the bank. She sat with her elbows on her knees and her face between her hands, staring helplessly and hopelessly out of an unknown world.

”We’ll call it ’*Perdue*,’” said Pynsent. ”The subject is trite, but the treatment will redeem that. I spotted that girl last year in the Rue du Chat qui Peche. Aren’t her eyes immense?”

Mark protested in vain. Pynsent ordered him to begin work. In eight days the picture was painted. Pynsent had not laid a brush upon it, but Mark was miserably conscious that his friend’s genius informed almost every stroke. For hours Pynsent stood at his side, exhorting and encouraging.

”It’s really good,” said Pynsent, after he had forbidden his pupil to add another touch.

”But it’s not m-m-mine, Pynsent.”

”What?”

"I couldn't have p-painted it without you."

"Pooh!"

At Siron's Mark's friends predicted success, a place on the line, honourable mention, a prize, possibly. Saphir saw it and whistled.

"You painted that—you?"

They were standing in the dining-room, panelled with studies, some of them signed by famous men. Mark's friends were all present, and in the background Madame Siron smiled genially, murmuring that monsieur certainly must add a tiny sketch to her little collection. Mark glanced from face to face. The general expression was not to be misinterpreted. In the eyes of those present he had "arrived."

"*Tiens!*" said Saphir; "it is not signed. You must sign it, *mon garçon*."

A bystander produced a brush and palette.

"It grows upon one," said Saphir, shading his eyes. "He has lots to learn in technique, but the feeling which cannot be imparted is there. *Saperlipopette*! It brings tears to the eyes. And look you," he addressed Pynsent and Mark in broken English, "I am not easily moved—I! When I lose a friend of ze blood—how do you call it?—a relation, yes, ze tears do not come—no! And when I hear Wagner—*zoum, soum, zoum*—ze tears do not come, no! But when I hear Rossini, Bellini—rivers, *mes amis*, rivers!" With a large gesture he indicated a tropical downpour; then he continued: "It is ze melodie. Is it not so, *mes enfants*?"

He appealed to the circle around him. Mark listened, stupefied, to a clamour of congratulation.

"Sign it—sign it!" they cried.

Mark took the brush with a queer smile upon his wide mouth. The others fell back to give him room.

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" ejaculated Saphir.

Mark had copied cleverly Pynsent's bold signature; below it in small script was: "*per* M. S."

Pynsent bit his lip, frowning. The others stared at Mark, who met the startled interrogation of their raised brows with a nervous laugh.

"The f-f-feeling you speak of," he turned to Saphir, "is his," he indicated Pynsent. "I cannot s-send it to the Salon as my work, but I shall k-keep it and v-value it as long as I live."

Saphir held out his hand.

"My friend," he said in his own tongue, "if you were not an Angliche, I should ask to have the honour of embracing you."

"He's a quixotic fool," Pynsent growled; "I never touched the canvas."

The others vanished, put to flight by an intuition that something was about to happen. Mark addressed Saphir.

"When you were here last you s-said to a friend of mine that it was fortunate for me, that I had private means. You are my master; you have seen everything I have done. This, you understand, does not c-c-count. Pynsent knows my work, too, every line of it. I ask you both: Am I w-w-wasting my time?"

Neither answered.

"No mediocre success will content me," continued Mark. "I ask you again: Am I w-w-wasting my time?"

"Yes," said Saphir gruffly. He put on his hat and went out.

"He's not infallible," Pynsent muttered angrily.

"Then you advise me to g-go on? No; you are too honest to do that. I shall not go on, Pynsent; but I don't regret the last three years. They would have been wasted indeed if they had b-b-blinded me to the truth concerning my powers."

"What will you do, Mark?"

"I don't know—yet," said Mark.

Mark returned to England, where he learned of Betty's conquests. The Duke of Brecon, so Lady Randolph told him, had to marry a million, otherwise he might have offered Miss Kirtling the strawberry leaves. Harry Kirtling, the cousin, very handsome, and a passionate protester, wooed in vain, much to the Admiral's dismay, a dismay tempered by Betty's assurance that she did not wish to leave her uncle for many a long year. A prosperous rector proposed in a letter which began: "My dear Miss Kirtling,—After much earnest thought and fervent prayer, I write to entreat you to become my wife...." This gentleman was a widower on the ripe side of forty. Pynsent, too, confessed that had he not been bond to Art, he might have become Betty's slave.

Mark saw her on the day when she was presented at Court, on the day when she held a small court herself at Randolph House, after she had kissed her sovereign's hand. Like the young man in the parable, Mark went away from Belgrave Square very sorrowful, because Betty seemed so rich and he was so poor.

About this time he met the future Bishop-Suffragan of Poplar, David Ross, then head of the Camford Mission. A man of extraordinary personal magnetism, Ross had begun by challenging public attention as the champion middle-weight boxer of his year. He possessed a small forest in Sutherland and abundant private means; but, to the amazement of his friends, he took Orders and accepted a curacy in the East End. His lodge in Sutherland was turned into a sanatorium, whither were sent at his expense clergymen who had broken down in health. David Ross had the highlander's prophetic faculty and intuition. Where others crawled, he leaped to conclusions respecting his fellow-creatures. When he met Mark, for

instance, he divined his mental condition: the suffering denied expression, the disappointment, the humiliation. But he divined far more—something of which Mark himself was unconscious: a religious mind, religious in the sense in which Bishop Butler interpreted the word—submissive to the will of God. This quality in combination with a passionate energy and determination to win his way arrested Ross's attention and captivated his interest. He asked Mark to become a guest at the Mission.

Here the almost invincible odds against which a dozen men were struggling whetted to keen edge Mark's vitality and love of fighting. Listening to David Ross, it seemed incredible that he should have pinned his ambition to the painting of a picture. At the end of a couple of months' hard work in the slums he said abruptly to Ross: "If I can overcome my confounded stammer, I shall take Orders."

Ross held his glance.

"Do nothing rashly," he said gravely.

Time, however, strengthened Mark's resolution. He set to work to overcome his stammer. When he told his family of his intention to take Orders, each member in turn protested.

"You—a parson?" The Squire was scarlet with surprise.

"There is only one living," bleated Mrs. Samphire.

"Oh, I shan't compete with old Archie," said Mark, smiling.

Lady Randolph, however, said to Betty: "He is the right man to lead—*lead*, mind you—forlorn hopes."

"And be killed," Betty answered vehemently.

"I don't think he will be killed, my dear."

For many months after this he worked with Ross, seeing but little of his family and friends.

In the following February the Admiral died after a short sharp attack of pneumonia. Mark attended his funeral, and exchanged a few words with Betty, to whom was left everything the kind, eccentric old man possessed. Betty broke down when she saw Mark's sympathetic face. She had nursed her uncle faithfully; she had loved him very dearly; she realised that she was alone in a world which held pain as well as pleasure. Mark tried to comfort her.

"You have so many friends, Betty."

"Friends?" She smiled through her tears. "Friends are like policemen—always round the corner when most wanted. I might want you, and you—you—would be somewhere in Whitechapel."

Mark opened his mouth, and shut it again resolutely.

During that week he saw her twice. It was settled that The Whim should be

let till she came of age; Betty living, meanwhile, with her guardian and trustee, Lady Randolph. Miriam Hazelby helped Betty to pack up the Admiral's china, and, when Mark called, played watchdog. She liked Mark and respected him; but she respected also the late Admiral's wishes. Mark noted that Miss Hazelby's affection and sympathy for Betty did not obscure her powers of observation.

"Betty," she said to Mark, "has a mind which till now has been a sundial: recording only the bright hours. I confess that I am anxious about her. When I left her I told the Admiral that she carried too much sail and not enough ballast. As a seaman he approved my trite little metaphor."

Mark began to praise Betty.

"Oh," said Miss Hazelby drily, "she has been fortunate in knowing good people to whose standard she tries to attain. It has been easy for her to avoid evil in King's Charteris, but in Belgrave Square——"

The excellent lady sniffed.

"Lady Randolph will keep an eye on her," said Mark.

"She'll need both eyes," retorted Miss Hazelby.

CHAPTER IX

AT KING'S CHARTERIS

Two years later, in April, Mark Samphire preached his first sermon at King's Charteris. He had wrestled with his stammer as Christian did with Apollyon, and he told Archie that he had reason to believe it was mastered when the brothers met at Pitt Hall upon the Saturday preceding Mark's appearance in the village pulpit.

"I passed some severe tests, before they admitted me to deacons' orders," he said.

Archie stared curiously at an unfamiliar Mark. "You don't look very fit."

"I've been like a bird in the hand of a fowler, a fluttering tomtit trying to escape. Ross rescued me. You must get to know Ross: he's a splendid fellow. I've talked to him a lot about you."

Archibald nodded, well pleased to find Mark's eyes lingered upon his handsome face and imposing figure with the same pride and affection as of yore, out he was conscious also of a mental change in his brother, divined rather than apprehended. Mark spoke with enthusiasm of work in congested districts, he gave

lamentable details, he indicated colossal difficulties.

”And this sort of thing satisfies you?” said Archie heavily. ”Although, as I take it, the results are visible. I like to see results. I keep a diary—of results. You were telling me just now of the difficulties of dealing with a shifting population: the people, for instance, round the London Docks. I couldn’t undertake that sort of work.”

”You want to count your sheaves,” said Mark.

”I am ambitious,” Archie admitted. ”Aren’t you?”

”Oh, yes. If I told you that I felt it in me to become a preacher, you would l-laugh perhaps.”

”You’ve always had plenty to say, Mark.”

”And if, one day, I could stand in the pulpit of such a fane as Westchester, if——”

”Why not?” said Archie.

”I try not to think of that. But those spires and pinnacles—I see them as in a vision.”

”What will be your text to-morrow?”

”That verse from Isaiah: ’*A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.*’ I shall not t-touch upon the prophetical interpretation. I want to show that any man, the humblest and weakest, may prove a shelter to others.”

Archie caught his enthusiasm.

”It is in you, Mark.”

”In me, yes; but suppose it won’t come out.”

”Do you know that Betty Kirtling is here?”

”Here?” He turned to hide his flushed cheeks.

”She is with Mrs. Corrance. We are asked to lunch there to-morrow. I accepted for you. Betty ran down from town yesterday on purpose to hear your first sermon.”

”Oh!”

”It’s a great compliment; for she has become a much-sought-after person. I see her name continually in the papers. Lady Randolph tells me that you refuse all invitations to Randolph House. Is that wise?”

”Wise?” Mark laughed, and thrust out a lean leg. ”Is this a leg for a gaiter?”

”That joke is worn threadbare,” said Archie, with a slight frown. ”I can’t see why your work should cut you off from old friends who have your welfare at heart. Lord Randolph got me my present curacy. He would do as much and more for you.”

”I shall certainly stick to Ross.”

Next morning Mark rose early after an uneasy and almost sleepless night.

He had been obsessed by a spirit of Betty. Whenever he closed his eyes she came to him. ”She is the creature of my dreams,” he told himself impatiently. None the less she dominated his waking hours, she stood behind that ever-increasing hope of becoming a great preacher. He had consumed gallons of midnight oil in the composition of sermons declaimed in unfrequented spots of Victoria Park. Now, the thought of preaching to the woman he loved filled him with bitter-sweet excitement. He dressed and went out into the park. Presently he came to an elm out of which flew some jackdaws chattering volubly. Their harsh notes brought back a morning when Archie and he, small schoolboys, had scaled this very tree in search of jackdaws' eggs. Yes; there was the hole, high up, out of which Archibald by his superior height and strength had secured the spoil.

Mark sat down, despite the protests of the jackdaws, and faced his thoughts. The talk with Archie of the night before came back to him. He had heard Archie preach. Archie's matter, perhaps, to the critical mind left something to be desired; but his manner was admirable and his voice clear, persuasive, melodious, an instrument of incomparable power and delicacy. Did Mark envy his brother? Did he grudge him a success already achieved? Did he grudge him—a subtler point—the greater success which undoubtedly he would achieve? To these questions he answered sincerely—”No.”

Leaving Archibald, his thoughts flew straight and swift to Betty. She had come to King's Charteris to hear him preach? Why? His heart flamed; for Archie had preached his first sermon in the village church. Had Betty travelled from town to hear Samphire major? No.

When he returned to Pitt Hall, he had made a sort of compromise with his pride, his conscience, and his God. Time was when he abhorred compromise, but David Ross had said that a life without compromise must prove entirely selfish or so selfless in its aims as to be abnormal. Mark admitted the possibility of breakdown. And if silence were imposed, he must shoulder the burden. Speech, on the other hand, if it were truly his, included speech with Betty. He felt assured that she expected him to speak, that she had travelled to King's Charteris to hear him speak. He could not have said why this conviction thrilled every nerve in his body; it simply was so.

During the first part of the service, Mark found time to study the faces of the congregation. Betty, sitting beside Mrs. Corrance, looked pale and anxious. Mark remembered that she had not entered the church since the Admiral's funeral. Having keen sight, he detected traces of tears, which moved him profoundly. Behind her, with his broad back against one of the pillars, sat the Squire, rigidly upright. He had come prepared to hear his boy—”the best boy in the world, sir”—

preach a fine sermon. During the rector's long and somewhat dry discourses, the Squire always assumed an attitude of profound attention, his fine head inclined upon his massive chest, his eyes and lips meditatively closed. If suspicious sounds had not escaped through his nose, none would have dared to accuse him of napping. But everybody, from the rector to the latest breeched urchin, knew that the dear man slept like a humming-top from introduction to peroration. He would not sleep to-day. Expectation, tempered by anxiety, informed his expression, the expression assumed by him at Lord's, when his sons were walking to the wicket. Literally interpreted, it said: "A Samphire may fail, but it is not likely to happen." Mark glanced from his father to Mrs. Samphire. Her prominent eyes, set too far apart, like a sheep's, were slightly congested; her puffy cheeks were flushed. It struck Mark that she would accept failure on his part with Christian resignation. She resented the fact that Mark was the favourite son of the Squire, who may have seen the quality in his youngest born which distinguished the mother, and which Mark alone inherited. Mrs. Samphire was inordinately jealous of the first wife.

Mark's thoughts wandered with his eyes. Just below the pulpit he saw Wadge, the head keeper, a thin, hard-bitten, sharp-featured man, whose brown face was framed in bushy red whiskers. Many a day's sport had Mark enjoyed with Wadge. He recalled a frosty morning when Jim Corrance, indiscreetly thrusting his hand into a burrow, had been nailed by a ferret. Behind Wadge was Bulpett, the butcher, a burly man, one of the churchwardens, and reputed to be worth a snug ten thousand pounds. What a lot of rats there used to be in his old slaughter-house before it was pulled down! Once Bulpett had caught Archie and Mark peeping through a chink in the slaughter-house at a calf he was about to kill. What silly idiots they felt when Bulpett politely invited them to come inside. And then Bulpett had laughed and said that he would send a nice piece of veal to Pitt Hall.

The rector gave out the psalms of the day. Archie's splendid voice filled the church. And who was this singing so shrilly and so abominably flat? Why dear old Ellen, to be sure—his first nurse—who must have walked all the way from Cranberry-Orcas. Ellen lived in a cottage near Cranberry brook, wherein Archie and he used to catch trout by the willow at the foot of her cabbage patch. She had been maid to the first Mrs. Samphire; and when Miss Selina Lamb came to Pitt Hall, Ellen married a porter, who had waited for her fifteen years. Mark knew the porter well. He was not an agreeable person, being rheumatic and asthmatic—and crusty in consequence—but at the time of the marriage the Samphire boys agreed that Ellen was wise in preferring him to the Ewe, their nickname for the stepmother.

How his thoughts were wandering!

With an effort he led them from the nave into the chancel. In this church a famous poet and scholar had ministered for more than a quarter of a century. The ancients from the workhouse, who sat in the front seats of the aisle, wearing white smock frocks, had been ruddy-faced youths when the poet first came to King's Charteris. And in the village the influence of this saint remained a vital force, although he had been dead nearly twenty years. This thought moved Mark to pray that he might be given the gift of tongues, which is not the faculty of speaking many languages, but the infinitely greater power of making our fellow-creatures feel what we feel—of touching them to issues finer than those which ordinarily engross them, of so setting forth what is strong and tender and true that other things, no matter what they may be, shrink and shrivel into the trivial and insignificant.

The psalms came to an end. Standing at the great brass lectern, Mark read the lessons without stutter or pause in a voice slightly harsh, yet susceptible of modulation. Later, in the same harsh, penetrating tone he gave out his text. The scrapings of feet, the rustle of skirts, the occasional cough were silenced. Mark began his sermon by asking his hearers to consider man's relation to others: a theme informed by him with phrases and illustrations drawn from personal observation of village life. Betty Kirtling felt as if she were peering into a magic mirror, wherein she saw herself illumined by a strange light, and this shining image was no phantom of the imagination, but her true substantial self, the woman as God intended her to be, with finite aims and appetites subordinate and subservient to the majestic design and purpose of the Infinite.

To her right were the village boys, a mob of sluggish-minded urchins, the raw material out of which is fashioned the Slowshire yokel. But each boy—so Betty noted—was gazing at Mark with intelligence and affection. He held them in thrall. The hard lines about Mrs. Samphire's eyes and mouth softened. The Squire was staring into the face of the preacher—seeing, hearing, feeling the mother of his son.

And then, when the great thing for which Mark had laboured as patiently as Demosthenes, seemed within his grasp, when he had proved to the meanest understanding that he had something to say which the world would hear gladly, his infirmity seized him. In the middle of a phrase he began to stutter. His face grew convulsed, his thin hand went to his throat, as if seeking to tear from it the abominable lump. But no articulate word followed. Only a stutter falling with sibilant hiss upon the dismayed congregation.

At that moment a nervous, hysterical girl tittered. The woman seated next to her glared indiscreet rebuke. The wretched creature burst into discordant laughter. Betty heard the girl's laughter and saw Mark's twisted face. His eyes met hers in a glance which she could not interpret, as the girl who had laughed

was led weeping from the church. The great oak door clanged behind her, and in the silence which followed Mark attempted to continue his sermon, but the last desperate effort to conquer a physical disability cannot be described. Betty covered her face. Old Ellen burst into piteous sobs. Mark turned towards the altar, the congregation rising. Then, with a firm step, he descended the steps of the pulpit.

The brothers came out of the vestry together, passed in silence through the churchyard, where Easter flowers were shining in the shadows cast by the lindens, crossed the village street, and strolled up the lane which led to Westchester Downs. In the street a small crowd had collected, including Wadge and Bulpett. Further down, by the lychgate, stood the Samphire landau. Mark saw a burly figure, and a face, redder even than usual. When the Squire perceived that his sons were crossing the street he got into the carriage.

"It's hard on him," said Mark. "The dear old man was so certain I should score."

The crowd made way; all the men touched their hats; upon every face was inscribed sympathy and affection. Bulpett advanced, holding out his huge hand. "Gawd bless ee, sir, we be tarr'ble sorry we be; but try again, Master Mark, try again!"

"Thank you, Bulpett," said Mark, without stammering. He glanced at the circle of kindly faces. "By Jove! it's good to have such friends."

The brothers walked on till they reached a bank flaming with primroses, and sloping to the old chalk-pit, where as boys they used to find fossils.

"You *will* try again?" said Archie nervously.

"Again and again," Mark answered. "All the same, I have the feeling that I shall never be a preacher."

The words burst vehemently from his lips. He was very pale, but calm. Archibald seemed quite overcome. Mark then said slowly: "I am not fit to preach."

"What?"

"I—I felt this morning a desire for material success which appalled me. I had touched you—all of you—to something fine, but—I cannot talk about it, even to you."

He paused with his eyes upon a distant cloud.

"That wretched girl!" groaned Archibald.

Mark's quietness seemed to exasperate the elder brother.

"I can't follow you," he said irritably. "Why shouldn't one want the good things of this world: power, position, honour?"

"Don't I want 'em? Great heavens! don't I hunger for 'em? But if they are

not to be mine, what then?"

"You kiss the rod? In your place I should be furious, beside myself with resentment."

"Good old Archie," said Mark, taking his brother's hand and pressing it.

He stood up, reminding Archie that Mrs. Corrance had asked them to lunch with her.

"Betty cried like a baby," said Archie irrelevantly.

Mrs. Corrance received them in the small hall of her house, welcoming Mark with a mute sympathy more eloquent than words. Mark broke the silence as Betty came forward.

"I made a sad mess of it," he said, smiling genially.

But as he was washing his hands in Jim's room upstairs, his face hardened. He went to the window which overlooked Mrs. Corrance's rose-garden. At the end of a *pergola*, glorious in June with the blossoms of an immense Crimson Rambler, he could see a small arbour wherein Mrs. Corrance was in the habit of sitting whenever the day proved fine. This arbour was the prettiest thing in the garden, and the one which brought most vividly to mind his childhood. Here, many and many a time, Mrs. Corrance had read to and played with Jim and the Samphire boys. He could just remember how dreary and neglected this garden had been when the arbour was built. Out of a chaos of weeds and stones and broken crockery (for the outgoing tenant had used this backyard as a dumping-ground for rubbish) Mrs. Corrance had created a lovely little world, a tiny domain peculiarly her own, fragrant with memories sweet as the thyme and lavender of its herbaceous borders. As a boy, Mark often wondered why time and care were lavished upon a piece of ground so insignificant. Now he knew. Mrs. Corrance had had the joy of fashioning beauty out of ugliness.

At luncheon he told some anecdotes of life in Stepney. Archibald's gloomy face and Betty's tell-tale eyelids kept his tongue wagging, but his thoughts were in the pulpit of King's Charteris Church or in Mrs. Corrance's rose-garden. The one seemed to have affinity with the other. Would his life remain a wilderness of weeds and broken crockery?

After luncheon he found himself alone with Betty in the arbour. He had dreaded this moment; so had she; and yet each was sensible of a harmony no more to be interpreted than the murmur of the wind in tall grasses.

"What are your plans?" she asked.

Indirectly he answered by speaking of life at the Camford Mission. She listened, computing the distance between Randolph House and Bethnal Green.

"You talk as if work—such work, too,—were all that is left."

He was silent. Her face, delicately flushed, brimming over with a tender and imaginative pity, implored him to speak.

”Work lies between me and what is left,” he answered slowly, watching the pulse beat in the blue veins of her white neck.

”You may be famous yet,” she whispered. ”This morning when you began I—I almost forgot that it was you. And when I looked round, everybody, even the village boys, were spellbound.”

”But when I f-f-failed,” said Mark hurriedly, ”you, you felt what I f-f-felt, that, that——” He put his hand to his throat, unable to finish the phrase because of the detestable lump rising and swelling in his throat.

”You thought *that* because I cried.”

He nodded, seeing again her despairing gesture.

”I am sorry I was such a poor friend,” she said quickly. ”I ought not to have cried. I behaved like a weak fool. You will succeed yet, Mark. I know it; I know it.”

The lump in his throat seemed to dissolve.

”But,” she continued, ”if—if it should be otherwise, do you think that I would care? Do you measure my friendship for you by the world’s foot-rule?”

Mark seized her hands.

”God bless you!” he said passionately. ”God bless you, dear, dear Betty!” Then abruptly, with a strange smile, he added, ”Good-bye!”

He had gone before she could recover her wits or her voice. She stood alone, a piteous figure, truly feminine inasmuch as she was not able to pursue the man.

”Oh, oh!” she cried, covering her face as she had done in the church. ”I cannot bear the misery behind his smiles.”

CHAPTER X

AFTER THREE YEARS

”I am growing older and older,” said Betty Kirtling.

Lady Randolph, looking up from a paper, peered through her glasses at charms which Time had embellished rather than diminished. Betty had passed her twenty-second birthday; she had begun her fifth season; but by virtue of high health and spirits she still retained the bloom and freshness of the *débutante.* She stood at the middle window of the morning-room of Randolph House, the big brown house at the corner of Belgrave Square, from whose hospitable

doors Archibald and Mark Samphire had driven to Lord's Cricket Ground when they were Harrow boys. Outside, a May sun was shining after a shower; and in the puddles on the balcony some sparrows were taking their bath. Betty was reflecting that London sparrows must be very uncomfortable in a dry summer.

"Are you wiser?" Lady Randolph asked.

"I know that sparrows wash themselves, and that skylarks don't," Betty replied. "I suppose the London sparrows had to bathe, and that they learned to love it. How jolly they look, splashing about. That must be a cock bird. Do you see? He takes a whole puddle to himself."

Lady Randolph laid down the *Morning Post*.

"Archibald Samphire has been made a minor canon of Westchester," she said abruptly.

Betty slightly turned her head. Lady Randolph perceived a faint pink blush tinging the whiteness of her neck.

"And Jim Corrance is coming here to luncheon—to-day."

Betty's exclamation at this must be explained. Jim had spent three years in South Africa, buying and selling gold-mines. He was now a junior partner in the great firm which he had entered five years before as a clerk.

"I shall ask Archibald Samphire and Jim to come to us at Birr Wood for the Whitsuntide recess. Do you think Mark would join them!"

"Perhaps; if you were careful to make no mention of me."

"Betty?"

"He shuns me as if I were a leper. I've not seen him for eighteen months. Yes—ask him. Make him come! I should like to meet those three once again."

She ran from the room, laughing. Lady Randolph frowned. "Does she care for Jim?" she was reflecting, "or is it still Mark? Or—is it Archibald? She has always been loyal to her boy lovers." Her wise old eyes began to twinkle. Many men, some of them irreproachable from the marriage point of view, had fallen in love with the Kirtling girl with the De Courcy eyes, but in vain. "And yet she is not cold," mused her friend; "a passionate nature if ever there was one. How will it end?" She often told herself that this ever-increasing interest in Betty made life worth the living. She recognised in her qualities which invited speculation. Betty had a sense of religion lacking, or let us say elementary, in Lord Randolph's wife; on the other hand, the girl's sense of humour was less keen than her own. Pynsent—she liked Pynsent—always spoke of Betty's unexpectedness. So far, what she had done and said had been more or less conventional. That indicated Irish blood—the wish to please those with whom she lived.

Her reflections were interrupted by Jim Corrance. He explained that he had landed at Southampton within the week.

"I saw this house last night," he concluded, "and it brought back the days

when you were so kind to us. So I asked if you were at home. And I was delighted to get your wire this morning. Is Betty here?"

"No." His face amused his old friend, but she added quickly: "She is upstairs, prinking—for you. Have you seen Mark Samphire?"

"I saw him yesterday, and I shall see him again this afternoon," said Jim gravely. "Mark is overworked, you know."

"I don't know," said Lady Randolph drily. "Tell me about him."

Jim began to describe the difficulties against which Mark was contending. Lady Randolph's eyes lost their sparkle.

"Do you believe all you say?" she asked when Jim paused. "You indict Mark's common sense and worldly wisdom, but are you as sure as you seem to be that he is tilting at windmills?"

Corrance was silent.

"I have used your arguments a thousand times," continued Lady Randolph, "and always, but always, I have doubted their real value. And I am supposed to be a scoffer, a freethinker, a woman of the world. It is amazing that I can sympathise at all with Mark, yet I do, and so do you, my friend. You are no more sure than I that he is not right in sacrificing the things which we rate so highly. When I last saw him his face was haggard and white, but he looked happier than you."

Jim stared at the pattern in the carpet, till an awkward pause was broken by the entrance of Betty, a radiant vision from which the young man laughingly shaded his eyes. Her welcome was so warm, that Lady Randolph made certain the girl's heart was untouched so far as Jim Corrance was concerned. Soon after the three joined Lord Randolph in the dining-room, where Jim was persuaded to talk of what he had done and what he hoped to do. The sun had been shining on him steadily during three years; and its glow illumined the present and the future.

"You look pink with prosperity," said Betty; then she added: "Have you heard of Archie's preferment? he has been made a minor canon of Westchester."

"Archibald Samphire is the handsomest young man in the Church of England," observed Lord Randolph.

"Mark always said that Archie had a leg for a gaiter," Corrance remarked.

"A well-turned leg," said Lady Randolph, "carries a man into high places; and Archie is hard-working, discreet, and ambitious. He will climb, mark me."

Obviously Jim was delighted to hear of his friend's success; but Betty's expression defied interpretation.

"It's queer," said Corrance, "but old Archie has always got what he wanted. Some fellows at Harrow called it luck. I don't believe in luck."

"I do," cried Betty. "So did Napoleon. Archie is lucky. Do you know that he has come into an aunt's fortune—about eight hundred a year—which ought

to have gone to the eldest son—George? Archie won the old lady's heart, when he was a boy, by writing her a wonderful letter; George pinched her pug's tail, or threw stones at her cat, or something. Archie behaved nicely, and his letter, I believe, was a model."

"Well—I'm hanged!" exclaimed Jim. "Was it Aunt Deborah Samphire? It was—eh? Well, I remember that letter quite well. Mark dictated it, for a lark. And I contributed a word or two. She sent Archie a fiver when he got into the Sixth, and he came to us. Mark said that Aunt Deb should have a letter which would warm the cockles of her heart. It was a masterpiece."

"Um!" said Lord Randolph. "This young fellow is certainly a favourite of the Gods. Luck? Good Gad—who can doubt it? There was that scoundrel Crewkerne——"

He plunged into a story which began behind the counter of a haberdasher's and ended in the House of Lords.

"Crewkerne had the devil's own luck," Lord Randolph concluded; "and luck seems to sit beside young Samphire and you, my boy, but the other lad, Mark, the fellow with the eyes, is one of the unlucky ones. That first sermon of his now——"

"Which was also his last," said Betty.

"Eh—what?" Lord Randolph stared. "You don't mean that. He has tried again—surely?"

"Again—and again," said Betty, "but his stammer always defeats him."

"And he had the real stuff in him," said Lord Randolph. "What a pity it was not allowed to come out!"

"The real stuff always comes out," said Lady Randolph, rising.

When Jim took his leave a few minutes later, he was under promise to spend Whitsuntide at Birr Wood. Lady Randolph commissioned him to persuade Mark to be of the party. Archibald—she felt assured—would join them. But it must be made plain that a refusal from Mark would be considered an offence.

Outside, Jim lit an excellent cigar which he smoked as a cab whirled him eastward. Years afterwards he remembered that drive: the swift transition from Belgrave Square to the Mile End Road. He had seen Mark the day before, but only for a few minutes, because some poor creature had come running for his friend. But those few minutes stood out sable against the white background of their previous intercourse. Never could he forget Mark's delight at seeing him: the light in his blue eyes, the grasp of his thin hand, the thrill of his voice. And yet, to offset this, was the grim fact that his friend's health and strength were failing. And this failure, measured by his (Corrance's) success, seemed tragic. Yet was it? The question festered. And that long drive, the gradual descent of the hill of Life, lent it new and poignant significance. If Mark had forsworn all

Randolph House included—and it held Betty Kirtling—what had he gained?

The well-bred grey between the shafts of the hansom sped on past the houses of the rich and mighty, and plunged into the roaring world of work. Here, on both sides of the street, in flaming gold letters for the most part, were the names of the successful strivers, the prosperous tradesmen, merchants, and bankers. Farther on, in Fleet Street, might be seen other names—those of the heralds and recorders of human effort—the famous newspapers. Jim's eyes sparkled, and his heart beat faster. For the moment he forgot the dun streets behind these resplendent thoroughfares—the interminable miles and miles of houses which shelter the millions who toil and moil out of sight and out of mind!

Passing the Mansion House, the grey knocked down a ragamuffin. Corrance was out of his cab in a jiffy, but the urchin scrambled up, apparently unhurt. Jim gave him half a crown and a scolding, much to the amusement of the burly policeman, who was of opinion that the young rascal might have done it on purpose. Jim was horrified. "Bless yer, sir, they'd do more than that to get a few coppers." These words stuck in his thoughts.

When he reached the Mission House he was received by one of the younger members—a deacon full of enthusiasm which flared, indeed, from every word he spoke. Corrance was struck by the lad's face—his bright complexion, clear eyes, and general air of sanity. Some of the men at the Mission were ill-equipped for the pleasures of life, and therefore, perhaps, more justified in accepting its pains in the hope of compensation hereafter. They, to be sure, would have repudiated indignantly the barter and sale of bodies and souls. None the less, the self-sacrifice of one pre-eminently qualified to win this world's prizes became the more remarkable.

"Samphire will be here in five minutes," said the young fellow. "Can I offer you anything—a whisky and soda, a cigarette?"

"If you will join me."

"I shall be glad of the excuse," replied the other frankly. "It is horribly thirsty weather—isn't it? And a thirst is catching. I've been working amongst the navvies this morning. Glorious chaps—some of them! I attend to the games, you know—cricket and football."

He plunged into a description of the men with whom he had dealings; and from them, by a natural transition, to David Ross, who had just been ordained Bishop of Poplar. For David Ross great things were predicted.

"It's like this," he concluded: "Our people are waking up. Time they did, too. And the men who will fill the big billets will be those who have seen active service. I don't sneer at the scholars, but a bishop nowadays must be more concerned with the present than the past. Ross chucked the schools, and he was right; he has given his attention to conditions of life amongst the very poor, and

I believe he knows more about 'em than most men of twice his age and experience. Samphire's friends may think he's wasting his time—from a worldly point of view, I mean—down here in the slums, but he isn't."

Mark's entrance cut short this conversation, and the speaker withdrew at once.

"Nice boy," said Mark. "The sort we want most, and so seldom get. Half our fellows are discouraged, and show it; but I'm not going to talk shop to you, old chap."

"I saw Betty Kirtling to-day," said Jim abruptly. "It's amazing that she is still Betty Kirtling."

Mark said nothing. Jim, after a keen glance at his pale face, began to speak of the Whitsuntide party, which at first Mark refused to join. Jim grew warm in persuasion, accusing Mark of churlishness, making the matter one personal to himself. Finally, Mark consented to spend four days at Birr Wood.

"We shall hear Archie preach in Westchester Cathedral," Mark said.

"I wish it were you," Jim replied quickly.

"I shall never p-p-preach," stammered Mark.

A few minutes later the friends were on their way to one of those squalid courts which lie between the Mile End Road and the river. To Jim the dull uniformity of the houses indicated a life inexorably drab in colour and coarse as fustian in texture. But Mark had the microscopist's power of revealing the beauty that lies imprisoned in a speck of dust. Seen by the polarised light of his imagination these dreary dwellings showed all the colours of the spectrum. Here lived a family of weavers; there, behind those grimy windows, were fashioned the wonderful hats—the bank-holiday hats of Whitechapel. Of every trade pursued in this gigantic hive he had the details at his tongue's tip; and through the woof of his description ran golden threads. More than once Corrance touched upon the obstacles—the ever-shifting population, the indifference which lies between class and class, the drunkenness, the premature marriages of penniless boys and girls.

"These are mountains—yes."

"You have set your face to the stars, and you do not look back—eh?" Corrance said quickly. He was sorry he had put the question, for he felt that Mark would not try to evade it.

"Look back?" cried Mark. "Aye—a thousand times; and, perhaps, as one climbs higher the pleasant valleys will grow dim. I'm not high enough for that," he added hastily.

"You have climbed far above me," said Jim vehemently; "and far as you have climbed I have gone twice as far—down hill." Then, reading dismay in Mark's face, he added with a laugh: "Don't speak; I have said too much already. You have the

parson's power of compelling confession. Tell me more about these weavers!"

Mark obeyed, conscious that troubled waters surged between himself and his old friend.

CHAPTER XI
IN LOVE'S PLEASAUNCE

Birr Wood lies within three miles of Westchester upon the banks of the Itchen. The house itself—the home of the Randolphs for four centuries—was rebuilt by Inigo Jones, and has been mentioned by Lord Orford as being one of that great architect's best works. Like many of Jones's palaces, Birr Wood is a show place. The magnificent avenue, the Italian gardens, the terraces, the disposition of the trees in the park are mere accessories to the vast white pile which dominates the whole—a glittering monument to rank and wealth and power.

Pynsent, who had painted four members of the Randolph family, admired the house enormously, but he maintained that it must remain greater than any man who might inhabit it. The splendid columns and pilasters, so expressive of what is enduring in Greek art, were designed obviously to last for ever, albeit the Randolphs themselves, once so numerous, so vigorous, and so pre-eminent, were dwindling to extinction. Pynsent, possibly because he was an American, failed to apprehend the pathos of this. Mark Samphire said to him: "It is so horribly sad to think that soon there will be no Randolphs at Birr Wood."

"Um," replied the painter, "how much sadder it would be if there were no Birr Wood for the Randolphs, or those that come after them. Suppose it burned down—eh?"

Mark was silent.

"I have heard you say," continued Pynsent, "that the work, the best work of men's hands, is greater than the men themselves. And you are right. To me Birr Wood is not the ancient home of the Randolphs, nor the masterpiece of Inigo Jones, but a materialisation, adapted to modern needs, of the spirit of Greek architecture. For my part, kind as our friends have been, much as I like them as individuals, I feel that their house is, in a strained sense perhaps, profaned by the presence of an hereditary disease. The Randolphs Van Dyck painted were worthy to live at Birr Wood."

This talk took place upon the terrace facing the Italian gardens upon the

Friday preceding Whit Sunday. The Samphires, Pynsent, Jim Corrance and his mother, Betty Kirtling, young Kirtling (now Lord Kirtling), and three fashionable maidens made up a party which had assembled on that day, and would disperse upon the following Tuesday.

Jim had not met Archibald Samphire for some three years. Archie, Jim said to himself, might be only a minor canon, but already he had the air of a great gun. He spoke little, and it was understood that he was thinking of his sermon in Westchester Cathedral. After dinner, in the red saloon, he sang three songs: one a lyric, a Frühlingslied sweetly pastoral and simple; the second a love song by an eminent French composer; the last that hackneyed adaptation of Bach's lovely prelude, Gounod's "Ave Maria." When he moved from the piano the girls surrounded him, prattling thanks and entreaties for more. But Betty, so Corrance noted, sat still, with a faint flush upon her cheeks and a suffused light in her eyes.

"He sings extraordinarily well," said Jim.

"Yes," Betty sighed.

Just then Mark came up, rubbing his hands. His delight in his brother's voice struck Jim as being pathetic.

"It's the quality that does it," Mark explained. "That second song of his—rubbish—eh? But it thrilled—didn't it, Betty? And the tragic note, the note of interrogation: the forlorn 'why'—you heard that?"

"Yes, yes," said Betty hastily.

"A vocal trick," Jim observed, rather abruptly. Then he moved away, surrendering his seat to Mark, who dropped into it.

"Well?" said Mark, following Corrance's figure with his eyes. "What do you think of old Jim?"

"I am thinking of the new Jim," Betty answered. "And I suppose I can measure the change in myself by the change in him. Archie has changed too. Only you, Mark, remain the same."

She flashed a blinding glance upon him. Somehow Mark realised that the glance was an indictment.

"I have changed," he replied quickly.

"No—no. You are the same Mark, with the same ideas, the same ideals of years ago."

"Ideals?" The expression on her face bewildered him. Not a score of feet away the others were buzzing about Archie, but Betty and he seemed to be alone. "You used to share my ideals, Betty."

"You mean you shared them with me, but when you went away you took them with you. Now they are like you—out of sight."

"I am here now," he replied.

"Because your brother is here. You did not come to see—me."

"Perhaps I did," he murmured, his thin face aflame with colour. Betty's cheeks were pale, but her bosom heaved.

"If that be really true, I forgive," she whispered. "Only—prove it!"

She leaned towards him.

"Betty," he said hoarsely, "you know why I have stayed away from you." He looked so distressed that she feared the eyes of the others.

"You shall tell me that and more—to-morrow," she murmured, rising. "My cousin is crossing to us."

Young Kirtling wanted her to sing, but she refused.

"You always say 'No,'" he growled.

Pynsent joined them, followed by Archibald and the others. Lady Randolph seated herself beside Mark.

"We have not had a chat for an age," she began, and then went on abruptly: "How do you like my guests?"

Mark's eyes rested for an instant upon young Kirtling's handsome but rather saturnine features. Lady Randolph laughed and tapped Mark's hand with her fan.

"I didn't ask him. He asked himself. He is still mad about our Betty, but she flouts him. The Admiral wished it, as you know."

"And you," said Mark.

"I want the girl to be happy. And I shall be satisfied if she finds her peer outside the House of Lords. She has plenty of money and can marry whom she pleases."

For the second time that evening Mark's cheeks flamed.

"She beguiles all hearts," continued Lady Randolph, looking at Mark out of the corner of a shrewd grey eye; "Jim Corrance makes no secret of his feelings; and your handsome brother sang for her and at her—to-night. Somehow I can't conceive of her as the wife of, let us say, a bishop."

"There are bishops and bishops," said Mark.

"Just so. I am told that a certain person who has been labouring in a field which—which does not smell as one that the Lord hath blessed—may, if he continues to display his remarkable powers of organisation, wear lawn some day."

Then she spoke discreetly of other things, seeing that Mark's lips were quivering and his eyes shining; while the young man listened, hearing her pungent, pleasant phrases, but seeing only Betty—Betty—Betty!

Meantime that young lady had left the saloon accompanied by Pynsent, Kittling, and Jim Corrance. Mark could hear their voices in the room beyond, and Betty's voice, Betty's laugh, came clearly to his ears above the chorus, even as the silvery notes of a flute float upward from the clashing cymbals and roaring bassoons. Mark rose quickly and slipped away into the moonshine of the terrace.

For three years he had told himself daily that the woman he loved could never be his. Now—he drew a deep breath—she had come once more within his grasp. More, the world, in the person of his shrewd old friend, recognised that he, the failure, had not really failed, that he might have to give, even from the world's point of view, something worth the taking. And here, where material things possessed such significance, he could measure what he had accomplished with a detachment unachievable in Stepney. A thousand details presented themselves: a summons to the house of a great minister, an interview with a prince, who professed interest in the better housing of the poor, letters from celebrities asking for information, and his ever-increasing friendship with David Ross—now famous. The power of the orator had been denied him, and perhaps on that account he had been the keener to practise what otherwise he might have been content to preach.

He walked slowly down the terrace and into the garden which lay below, a conventional garden cut and trimmed to the patterns set by Le Nôtre at Versailles and known to the passing tourist as Love's Pleasaunce, because it was embellished by marble statues of Venus and attendant Amorini. In the centre sparkled a sheet of water wherein and whereon the fountains played on high days and holidays. Mark knew that the key to the middle fountain was concealed in an Italian cypress. Often as a boy he had begged permission to turn this key, and always, he remembered, there had been a certain disappointment because the English climate so seldom lends itself to such a scene, for instance, as Aphrodite rising from the waters. Now he reflected that he had never seen the fountains play by moonlight. The whim seized him to turn the key. A second later he was gazing spellbound at the goddess in the centre of the pool. At the touch of the shimmering waters the white image thrilled into life. Clothed with silvery tissues, which revealed rather than concealed the adorable grace of her limbs, Aphrodite smiled. Beneath the dimpled surface of the pool, her feet twinkled into a dance, a measure of the moon, slow, rhythmic, and set to the music of the fountain. Beyond, in the shadow of the cypresses, Mark caught a glimpse of two nymphs: one playing the double flute dear to Thebans, the other, seated, sweeping the strings of the Homeric phorminx. From these, surely, floated the liquid notes, the trills and cadences, which had stirred to movement the feet of the goddess. Mark touched the key again. The music died in a sigh. Aphrodite hid herself in the cold marble. The pool, so sweetly troubled, became still. Mark smiled and released once more the goddess. But the illusion had lost its spell. Mark touched the key for the last time, reflecting that Aphrodite rises once only for mortal men. And the pleasaunce, now, had a forlorn aspect. A cloud obscured the moon, so that the silver of the scene became as lead and the shadows grew chill and amorphous. Mark walked slowly away towards the lights of the house

which held Betty.

On the terrace he paused, startled by a deep voice. Archibald was calling him by name.

"You here?" said Mark.

Archie was seated on a stone bench, which stood in the shadows.

"Yes. Sit down!"

"You are in trouble," said Mark quickly. "Dear old fellow—what's wrong?"

"My sermon."

Mark sat down, saying: "Tell me about it."

Archie began to speak with a dogged intonation which recalled Harrow days. As he indicated the scope of the sermon already written out, Mark drummed with his foot upon the terrace.

"I know it," groaned the elder brother. "It will send the Dean to sleep, and Lord Randolph will twiddle his thumbs, and my lady will smile ironically—and Betty——"

"Yes."

"Betty will pity me."

A silence followed. Mark was reflecting that Betty's pity without Betty's love would be hard to endure.

"You care for her?" he muttered.

"Oh, yes," said Archibald impatiently, "but she says 'No' to me and everybody else. How I have loved that witch," his voice grew sentimental, "and how I should like to show her that I can preach. And so I can for ordinary occasions, but when it comes to a big thing—somehow I don't score. I'd like to score this time—eh? And if—if you could help me, why—why, it might make all the difference."

"About Betty?" Mark's voice was thin and strained, but Archie was too engrossed with his own thoughts to notice that.

"Betty? I'm not thinking about Betty. I mean that next Sunday may be the making or marring of my career.

"Oh!"

"I put my profession first, as you do, Mark. I can say to you what I would admit to no other, that success in it is vital to me. I've worked hard, and of course I've a pull over most fellows, for which I'm sincerely grateful; but I've not your brains."

"It happens," said Mark after a slight pause, "that I have written a sermon about Westchester Cathedral. You might find something in it; not much, I dare say; but a hint or two. As—as I shall never preach it, why—why shouldn't you have it?"

"I'd like to see it, Mark. Some of my best sermons have been suggested—

only suggested, mind you—by reading others. Robertson is a gold-mine—and Newman. Where is your sermon?”

”Locked up in my desk at the Mission House.”

”Oh!”

”I can nip up and get it,” said Mark, after a pause.

”I couldn’t allow that, Mark. You’re on a holiday and——”

”There’s stuff in that sermon,” Mark interrupted. ”I’d like you to see it. Holiday be hanged! I’ll fetch it to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XII

BETTY SPENDS AN HOUR IN STEPNEY

Betty Kirtling came down to breakfast the next morning in her prettiest frock, and with her prettiest smile upon a glowing face. Indeed, Lord Randolph, meeting her in the hall, held up his thin, white hand, and confessed himself dazzled. Betty laughed when he quoted a line of Dryden, sensible that only a poet could do justice to her looks if they reflected faithfully her feelings. Perhaps the philosopher, with his faintly ironical smile, knew better than the poet that ”the porcelain clay of human kind” is easily broken, and (being a collector) he may have remembered (which accounts for the shadows in his eyes) that rare pieces seldom escape chipping. He followed the girl into the dining-room, and saw that she seated herself next the chair which had been taken by Mark the morning before. Mark, however, was not in the room, his absence being accounted for by young Kirtling, who had met him driving to the station.

”To the station?” echoed Betty.

Archibald Samphire added that he was charged by his brother to make the proper excuses. Mark had gone to town on an important matter, and would return that evening before dinner. Lady Randolph frowned.

”’Pon my soul,” she exclaimed, ”our young man takes himself too seriously.”

”He’s the best and kindest fellow in the world,” said Archie. Then he hesitated. He could not explain the nature of Mark’s errand without exciting curiosity about himself and his sermon.

”What were you going to say?” whispered Betty.

”Mark has gone to town to do me a service,” said Archie.

She pouted: ”I believe Mark would do anything for you.”

With his eyes on his plate, Archie slowly answered, ”Yes.” Then seeing that Betty was trifling with her bacon, he added in a different tone: ”I advise you to try this omelette. Shall I get some for you?”

Betty said ”No” somewhat tartly, wondering why Mark had left Birr Wood. ”He might have told me last night at dinner,” she thought.

After breakfast she escaped from young Kirtling and Jim Corrance, and betook herself to a secluded spot in the gardens, where she sat staring at a pretty volume of verse—held upside down. It was intolerable that she should be sitting here and Mark sixty miles away. Then she smiled, remembering that only yesterday the distance between them had seemed immeasurable. And a word, a glance, had bridged it! What a miracle of Cupid's engineering! Her cheeks were hot as she wondered whether she had given herself away too cheaply. If propriety faltered ”Yes,” generosity thundered—”No.” She was sure she understood Mark better than any creature living, and certainly she understood herself. Always she had wanted him, but always—always! And he had wanted her, and would want her for ever and ever. It will be our object to show Betty Kirtling as a young woman of many facets illumined by lights and cross-lights; but for the moment she is presented beneath the blaze of Love, which, like the sun, eclipses other luminaries. Betty was an adept at, if not the mistress of, many accomplishments. She had been told that she might excel as a musician, a painter, or a writer, if she chose to give any one of these arts undivided attention. She preferred to play with all rather than work with one, and wisely, for her admiration of what others had done was certainly a greater thing than what she might have done herself. And, perhaps, because she had scattered her own energies, she was the more keenly appreciative of sustained endeavour wherever she found it. Young Kirtling, for instance, aroused interest because he hunted his own hounds as well as any man in England; Jim Corrance whetted mere affection into something with a sharper edge to it, inasmuch as he had sought fortune in South Africa and had found it; Archie was singing himself steadily and stolidly into such exalted places as the pulpit of Westchester Cathedral.

Sitting there in May time encompassed by Arcadian scents and sounds, Betty found herself speculating upon the mutual attraction of man and maid. Young ladies kill time with such meditations as pleasantly as men kill partridges. Betty, however, while sipping the sweet, made a wry face over the bitter. Mark's work in the slums stood between her and him, a mystery which she must accept, knowing that she could never understand it. The horrors amongst which Mark moved revolted her; the contrast between her life and his pierced imagination, and left it to bleed; pity, sympathy, the woman's desire to minister to infirmity, were drained, glutted, by the incredible demand upon them.

These meditations were disturbed by Lady Randolph. Betty, as soon as

she saw her kind friend, remembered that Lady Randolph had shown her this delightful nook, and had said that she (Lady Randolph) was in the habit of sitting here.

"You—alone?" said Lady Randolph. "I have just passed Harry Kirtling. He asked me if I knew where he could find you. Shall I tell him?"

"Pray don't," said Betty, making room for her friend on the stone bench. "And besides," she added, letting a dimple be seen, "you could not tell him where I was. I have spent the last hour in Stepney."

"I can't see you in Stepney, my dear."

"I thought you would say that," said Betty, nervously playing with the laces on her frock; then, reading the sympathy in the other's face, she burst out: "Oh—I'm a coward, a coward! I loathe Stepney."

Lady Randolph wondered whether it would be wise to speak. She cherished the conviction that when in doubt it is better to say nothing; and yet, in the end, despite a strong feeling that her advice would be wasted, she said quietly:

"I knew your mother."

"Am I like her?" interrupted Betty.

"I have often thought," continued the elder woman, ignoring Betty's question, "that if Louise de Courcy had had your upbringing her life would have been so different——"

"You mean she would not have married my father." Betty's voice hardened. "Well, if she felt as—as I feel, she would have married him anyway, if she loved him."

"She would not have loved him," said Lady Randolph with emphasis. "We women love the things which we are taught to believe are lovable. You, Betty, have been trained, trained, I say, to love things and people of good report. It was otherwise with your mother."

"And my father," added Betty. "I have always known that I was handicapped. Yes; I have been trained to see—it's a question of observation, isn't it?—to see and admire what is good in everything and everybody, but you don't know what a materialist I am. I delight in your flesh-pots. Why just now, when I was trying to walk with Mark through those horrible slums, I found myself thinking of what——? That delicious *macédoine* we had last night!"

Lady Randolph laughed.

"It's no laughing matter. I'm greedy; I spend too much time thinking of *chiffons*; and I spend too much money buying them; I adore great things, but I cannot give up small things. I want to run with the hare and course with the hounds. Lots of girls try to do both—and succeed in a feeble sort of way: a fast on Friday and feast on Saturday diet—eh?"

"In Stepney——" began Lady Randolph.

Betty seized her hands. ”Why should I go to Stepney?” she whispered, blushing. ”I'll be honest with you.”

”I hope so, my dear.”

”Mark is going to ask me to marry him. It may be to-day, or to-morrow, or the day after, but it's coming; and I shall fling myself into his arms.”

”Betty!”

”I haven't a spark of pride left. His long silence smothered it. Do you know that I have been at the back of all his ambitions? He wanted to be a famous soldier, because when we were babies I said I must marry a fighting man.”

”If he isn't a fighting man I never saw one.”

”Thank you. You always appreciated him. When he was spun for the army he thought he had lost me. I read despair in his eyes, and he, poor dear, couldn't read what was in mine. And then came that awful scene in King's Charteris Church. He gave me up then, but I stuck to him. And now—now,” her eyes filled with tears although her lips were smiling, ”he shall know that success or failure counts nothing with me. I want him—him. And anything which stands between us I abhor.”

Lady Randolph's attempt to reduce this speech to its elements found expression in a simple: ”You will ask him to give up Stepney?”

”I shall ask him to seek work in some place where you do not smell fried fish. There is plenty to do west of Temple Bar.”

”And the others? You have flirted with all of them, Betty; don't deny it!”

”But I do deny it.”

”You encouraged Harry Kirtling the season before last.”

”As if he needed encouragement!”

”He nearly persuaded you to marry him.”

”Yes, he did,” she confessed, blushing furiously. ”I burn when I think of that Ascot week. Bah! what fools girls are! Mark never came near me, answered my letters with post-cards. I give you my word—post-cards. I sent sheaves and received straws. And Harry makes love nicely.”

”You gave him lots of practice,” Lady Randolph observed drily.

”He wanted me so badly that he offered to give up his hounds and settle down wherever I pleased.”

”And Jim and Archibald.”

”My oldest friends.”

”Ah, well,” sighed Lady Randolph, ”you are a lucky girl, Betty. Four good fellows want you.”

”Archie wouldn't tell me why Mark went to town,” said Betty absently. ”What a voice he has! When he sings I feel like a Madonna. And his face——! A man has no business to be so good-looking. I am shameless enough to confess to

you, only to you, that his good looks appeal to me enormously. It annoys me. I find myself staring at him as if he were a sort of royalty. And when other girls do it, I think them idiots. Well, for that matter I have never disguised from myself, or you, that I am a bit of an idiot."

"You are very human."

"I am not all you think me," cried the girl. "And yet you read me better than anyone else, but there are pages and pages turned down. I peep at them sometimes, and am quite scared. Mark shall tear them out and tear them up. Dear me! I am making myself ridiculous: chattering on and on about myself."

"One is never ridiculous when one is young," said Lady Randolph solemnly, "and I hope, my dear, you will let me read the turned-down pages before they are torn up. I used to say to myself that I should like to begin life again, to have one more chance. And, listening to you, I feel that I am beginning again. It is exciting. Only I hope that sometimes you will listen to me, and try to profit by my experience of a subject on which you, Betty, are so amazingly ignorant."

"That subject's name is Legion."

"That subject's name is Man. You have tried, I dare say, to measure Mark with a girl's rule of thumb, to weigh him in virgin's scales, but his dimensions remain an unknown quantity."

For answer, Betty kissed her.

"Tell me," she whispered, "all you know that I do not know."

"We should sit here for forty years! Our world says you ought to marry Harry, and our world is always more than half right. Harry has entertained you with a vast deal of talk about himself, and perhaps you think you know him. Ah! you nod your head with all the cocksureness of ignorance! You spoke of his giving up his hounds—for your sake, because you might find Kirtling a far cry from Bond Street. Oh, the conceit of the modern girl! My dear, Harry knew well enough that if you became his wife, no such sacrifice would be demanded. The hounds would remain at Kirtling—and so would you. If you were beautiful as Helen of Troy, and fascinating as Cleopatra, you could not root out that passion for hunting his own hounds. It is a master passion—and always will be so long as he can sit in the saddle. And in your heart of hearts you respect and like Harry the more because he does that one thing really well."

"I am sure you are right," said Betty humbly.

"Well, my dear, what hunting the fox is to Harry, so is the hunting of vice, and ignorance, and dirt to Mark Samphire. The masculine ardour of the chase possesses both, and each will hunt the country he knows best."

Betty's silence provoked her friend to say more. "You are in for a fight, child." She took Betty's hand, which seemed cold, and pressed it gently. "On your own confession you are unfit to be the wife of the man you love, and who

loves you; and so—pray don't ask me for congratulations."

"You did not marry for love," cried Betty. Then she paused, ashamed. "Forgive me!"

"It is true." Lady Randolph turned a grim face to the girl, and her voice was harsh. "I did not marry for love. Shall we say that I lacked courage, or did I see clearer than you mountainous differences of temperament, taste, and opinion, which my love was not strong enough to scale? Was I a coward because I turned back? I do not say Yes or No. The man I loved had the brains, but not the body of a conqueror. Do you think that I was right or wrong because I refused to add burdens to a back already bowed?"

She spoke with such vehemence that Betty was frightened.

"I d-d-do not know," she stammered.

"*I* do not know," repeated the other fiercely. "When these mysteries between our lower and higher natures are revealed, I *shall* know, and not till then—not—till—then!"

Her lips closed violently, as if speech were alarmed into silence.

CHAPTER XIII
BAGSHOT ON THE RAMPAGE

Alone in his room at the Mission, Mark read over the sermon he had written upon Westchester Cathedral. Then he stared at the bare boards, the whitewashed walls, the narrow camp bedstead, the Windsor chairs: things eloquent of a renunciation which he had found sweet a week ago. Here he had been well content to live, here he had known that he might die. And now in these same familiar surroundings he felt another man; the tides of another life ran breast high to meet the quiet waters. Was it always so, he wondered? Did love, such love as he felt for Elizabeth Kirtling, such love as she felt for him, exact sacrifice? Must it be purged and purified in the flame of renunciation? And the answer came at once—Yes. Perhaps the answer always does come, if we put the question fairly and frankly to the Supreme Court of Appeal. Mark never doubted, then or thereafter, that if he took Betty and left his work, it would be ill for both of them. This conviction was buttressed by a half-score of proofs, trivial indeed in themselves, yet in their sum confirmation strong. Beneath his hand lay a memorandum-book. Mark opened it. On the first page was a list of names—drunkards all of them,

many women, a few boys and girls. These poor creatures leaned upon him. Each week they brought to him such of their earnings as otherwise would be spent in drink. With each Mark had fought—and prevailed. He alone held the master key to their hearts. People who live within a mile or two of the slums may sneer at a repentance or reformation founded upon an influence merely personal, which may be withdrawn at any minute. But those labouring among the very poor and ignorant are well aware that this personal influence, this amazing power and attraction which one soul may exercise over another, is the first lever by which ignorance, and poverty, and sin may be raised to the level whence the Creator is dimly seen and apprehended through the created. Mark knew, and every fellow-worker in the Mission knew, that personal influence may, and often does, soften the hard surface upon which it shines, so that other rays may penetrate, but he knew also that if personal influence be withdrawn before that softening process is complete, induration follows. Mark read over the names in the little book, and closed it with a sigh as a knock at his door was heard. The handsome young deacon entered the room.

"Hullo!" he cried, "I am glad you're here."

"What's up?" said Mark.

"Bagshot is on the rampage."

"The miserable sinner!"

"He got his wages last night, and came round as usual to give 'em to you, but he wouldn't give 'em to me. Then he went off."

"Didn't you go with him?"

"I wish I had thought of it," said the other ruefully. "He went straight from here to the 'Three Feathers,' and stayed there till closing time."

Mark looked at his watch. His train left Waterloo in an hour. He had time to see Bagshot, although such time would probably be wasted. Bagshot was a brand snatched from the burning some six weeks before: a big, burly, blackguard of a navvy, strong as Sandow, weak as Reuben, reasonable enough when sober, a madman drunk, with a frail wife and five small children at his mercy.

"I'll go alone," said Mark, as the young fellow reached for his hat.

He hurried off, followed at a discreet distance by the deacon. The Bagshots lived not far from the Mission, in Vere Terrace, a densely populated slum. Mark tapped at the door of Number 5, opened by a tattered girl of twelve, whose fingers and face were smeared with paste.

"Where's your father, 'Liza?" said Mark.

"Dunno," replied 'Liza. "'E's drunk, wherever 'e is. Would yer like to see mother, Mr. Samphire?"

Mark followed the child into the living-room of the family. Coming straight from Birr Wood, contrast smote him with a violence he had never before expe-

rienced. The Bagshot family sat round a rickety table making matchboxes. Deducting the cost of paste (which the matchmakers supply), these bring less than fourpence a gross, and a handy child of ten or twelve can make just about that number in a day's hard work! Facing Mark, stood an old-fashioned mangle, seldom used, because it took two strong women to turn it; to the right was a chest of drawers in the last stages of infirmity, crippled by ill-usage and long service, stained and discoloured like the face of the woman who was proud to own it; to the right a small stove displayed a battered assortment of pots and pans. The window, which overlooked a court, was propped open with an empty bottle. Into the court, half filled with rubbish and garbage, the May sun was streaming, illuminating an atmosphere of squalor and unhomeliness which hung like a fetid fog between the crumbling ceiling and the rotten floor.

"'Ere's Mr. Samphire, mother," said the girl. Already her thin, nimble fingers were at work, while her eyes sparkled with excitement. In the congested districts of the East End the decencies of life go naked and unashamed. 'Liza knew that her mother would burst into virulent speech, and was not disappointed. Bill was drunk again, and violent. She bared a part of her neck and bosom, showing a hideous bruise. 'Liza stuck out a leg not much thicker than a cricket stump, and offered to pull down her stocking. Another child had an ugly lump within three inches of his temple.

"It wos quite like ole times larst night," said 'Liza, grinning. "'E giv' us all what-for—'e did."

In answer to a question concerning Mr. Bagshot's immediate whereabouts, the wife replied sullenly that she neither knew nor cared; then, remembering Mark's efforts on behalf of the family, she added curtly: "I'd keep out of 'is wy if I wos you. 'E might drop in any minnit."

"And yer've got yer best clothes on," added 'Liza curiously. "Goin' beanfeastin' I dessay, or to a weddin'—yer own, my be," she added sharply.

"Stop yer noise, 'Liza," commanded the mother, wondering vaguely why her visitor was blushing.

"We wos goin' to Chingford to-dy," said the child with the lump on his head; "and mother promised us chops and mashed pertaters—didn't yer, mother?"

"I'd like ter eat chops and mashed pertaters for ever and ever," 'Liza said. Then, meeting Mark's eyes, she added: "That 'ud suit me a sight better than a golden 'arp or a 'evingly crown."

"You shall have chops to-day," said Mark, producing a florin. "Cut along and buy them."

"Mebbee yer aunt 'll let you cook 'em," said Mrs. Bagshot significantly. 'Liza nodded her shrewd little head and vanished; but a minute later she appeared, breathless. "Father's comin'. Yer'd better tyke yer 'ook, sir."

Mark said gravely he would stay. The children were despatched to the aunt's house.

"Yer'd better go, sir," said the wife, now pallid with fear. Mark smiled confidently, shaking his head. The drunkard's heavy, uncertain step was heard in the passage; his voice, thick and raucous, called for his wife.

"A word with you, Bill," said Mark, as the man's huge body darkened the doorway. The giant stared stupidly at the only fellow-creature he respected. Then his hand went mechanically to his head and removed a greasy cap. The woman sat down and began making a matchbox. "I beg your pardon," continued Mark, holding out his hand; "I told you that I would take over your wages each week, and last night I failed you. I am very, very sorry."

His blue eyes expressed much more. The heavy, bloodshot orbs of the huge navvy sought slowly the latent spark of ridicule or contempt. He was just sober enough to understand in some inexplicable way that the tables had been turned. When he saw the parson he had prepared himself for everything except this. Very awkwardly he took Mark's hand in his own enormous paw.

"Wot yer givin' us?" he growled.

"If the money is not all gone, Bill, I'll take what is left—now."

"Will yer?" said Bill.

"Yes."

Quality confronting quantity smiled steadily, reassuringly. Quantity scowled, wriggled uneasily, and quailed. A chink of silver and copper proclaimed the moral victory.

"Only seven-and-fourpence," said Mark. "You can't go to Chingford with that."

Bill said something which need not be recorded.

"It is like this," said Mark. "I failed you, and you failed me, and your wife and your children have suffered. I can see that you have a splitting headache, and I believe the forest air would do you good. Will you take Mrs. Bagshot and the children to Epping if I pay the piper? I ought to be fined for my part in this."

Bill nodded, none too graciously, and some money was given to Mrs. Bagshot.

"I'm going out of town myself," added Mark, as he took leave of the giant, "but I know I can trust you, Bill."

Mr. Bagshot grinned sheepishly. It is possible, although not very probable, that he had an elementary sense of humour. Mark hurried away looking at his watch. Just round the corner he charged into the deacon, who offered up fervent thanks that he was unhurt. "I must run," said Mark, pushing on, "or I shall miss my train." He did run till a hansom was found in the Mile End Road. Into this he jumped, bidding the driver use all reasonable haste. None the less as Mark

appeared on the platform at Waterloo the Westchester express was rolling slowly out of the station.

"Close shave that," said a quiet voice; "you might have been under the train instead of in it. Was it worth while?"

Mark sank, gasping, on to the cushions.

"Yes; it was worth while," he exclaimed, and then fainted.

When he recovered consciousness the train was running through Clapham Junction. Mark smelled brandy, and saw the impassive face of a tall, thin stranger bending over him. No other person was in the carriage.

"Keep quiet for five minutes," the stranger commanded.

Mark closed his eyes. His heart was thumping, but his brain worked smoothly. When he saw the train rolling out of the station he had been seized with an absurd conviction that he must overtake and travel by it to the great happiness awaiting him at Birr Wood. What followed was a blur, only, strangely enough, the voice of the tall, thin man was familiar. He had heard his calm, authoritative accents before; by Heaven! he had heard that voice repeating the same words: "*Keep quiet.*" And they had been spoken to the accompaniment of a thumping, throbbing heart and horrible physical weakness. Who—who was the speaker? Ah...! He remembered. The long, lofty room at Burlington House, the boys in all stages of dressing and undressing, the amazement and dismay on Jim Corrance's face—these unfolded themselves like the shifting scenes of a cinematograph.

"You are Amos Barger," he murmured.

He introduced himself to the surgeon, and spoke of the examination at Burlington House.

"You were very kind," said Mark, "but it was an awful experience for a boy, because now——" He paused to reflect that the man opposite had not asked for his confidence.

"Yes—now?" repeated Barger.

"Now, the sense of perpetual imprisonment"—he brought out the grim words slowly—"would not convey such a sense of loss."

The surgeon was not sure that he agreed. Could a young man, a boy, measure his loss? Was the capacity for suffering greater in youth?

"I am thinking of one thing," Mark replied, "liberty, the darling instinct of the newly fledged to fly. When you clipped my wings, I had the feeling that I should never move again. The pain was piercing: one could never suffer just such another pang."

"Have you learned to hug your chains?"

”I do not say that. They gall me less.”

”But as one grows older”—Amos Barger’s face was seamed with distress—”one sees what might have been so clearly. You say I was kind; the other surgeon was and is one of the cast-iron pots. Well, I expect no credit for such kindness. In you I see reflected myself. I am of the weaklings, to whom some incomprehensible Power has said: ’Thus far shalt thou go—and no farther!’ And I might have gone far had not my feet, the lowest part of me, failed. I am halting through life when every fibre of my body tells me I was intended to run.”

Mark was trying to adjust words to his sympathy, when the other continued abruptly: ”Don’t say a word! We are poles asunder and must remain so. I am surprised that I spoke at all. You have a faculty, Mr. Samphire, of luring Truth from her well.”

The two men looked at each other. Upon the one face disappointment had laid her indelible touch; upon the other glowed the light of hope and faith.

”Before we settle down to our papers”—the surgeon indicated an enormous pile of magazines and journals—”let me remind you that we spun you for the Service because you cannot run, with impunity, to catch trains—or, indeed, anything else.”

He picked up a review as he spoke and opened it. Mark eyed him vacantly, reflecting that he had run to catch Betty, not the train. And he had spoken of this meeting as coincidence. Was it coincidence? His heart began to thump once more. When he spoke his voice was hoarse and quavering.

”Thank you. I suppose just now you had time to make a rough-and-ready sort of examination?” The surgeon nodded. ”Is—is there anything organically wrong with my heart?”

”Um. It is organically weak—you knew as much before, but you may live to be sixty if you take care of yourself—which you won’t do.”

”If others were dependent on me I would take care of myself.”

”Oh!” Barger frowned. ”You are married—got a family—eh?”

”I have been thinking lately of—of marrying.”

The surgeon’s face was impassive. Mark looked out of the window at the pleasant fields of Surrey, through which the train was running swiftly and smoothly. Was Fate bearing him as swiftly and inexorably out of the paradise wherein he, poor fool, had already lived in anticipation many years?

”I infer from your silence,” he said, ”that if you gave a professional opinion it would be against marriage—for me?”

”I do not say that,” replied the other, shrugging his shoulders; ”but it will be time enough for me to give a professional opinion when you ask for one in a professional way. I’m running down to Bournemouth for a holiday, but I shall be at home next Tuesday. Come and see me. I’ll look you over, and answer that

question to the best of my ability."

"I'll come," said Mark.

"Afternoon or morning?" asked the surgeon, whipping out a pencil. "Book your hour!"

"Will three suit you, Mr. Barger?" The surgeon's pencil scratched upon the paper. Mark added: "I shall be punctual."

CHAPTER XIV
A MORAL EXIGENCY

Archibald met his brother at Westchester Station, and drove him towards Birr Wood as the shadows lay long and cool upon the white road. A sweet stillness hung over the ancient capital—the stillness which in springtime is eloquent of strife. Everywhere the sap was forcing its way upward; buds were swelling, leaves were bursting from their bonds. And an ethereal mildness permeated the atmosphere, suffusing in golden haze the setting sun.

"Pull up," said Mark.

"Eh?"

"I should like to read you my sermon here and now, within sight of the cathedral. We can walk across the downs afterwards, and arrive in plenty of time to dress for dinner."

"All right," Archie replied, "I'm keen enough to hear it. Was it hot in town? You look rather done."

A groom took the reins and drove off. Mark stared at the cathedral.

"It lies in a golden chalice," he said, indicating the haze which obscured the insignificant buildings of the town while lightening and revealing the splendid mass of stone, too heavy, too colourless when seen beneath grey skies.

"Good point that," said Archie, nodding his handsome head.

The brothers walked across a strip of down, and found themselves near a clump of trees. Mark pulled from his pocket a sheaf of manuscript, and read aloud.

Archie lay flat on his back. Presently he sat up, staring at the cathedral. Then he fixed his eyes on Mark's face, where they remained, fascinated, till the last word was said.

"Now," Mark commanded, "I want you to declaim a bit of it—standing. You

can give it all I cannot. Do you mind?"

Archibald took the manuscript, sensible of emotions and thrills never experienced before. Dominating these was the wish to do as he was asked—to declaim a part of the sermon. He felt a desire to possess himself of it, to incorporate with it his own physical attributes.

"Let yourself go," said Mark. He watched his brother's face intently, thinking that he would exchange the brains which had composed the sermon for the body now bending over it in envy and admiration. Archie had a gift for committing verse to memory. At Harrow he often boasted that he could read through a long ode of Horace and repeat it without making a blunder.

Presently Archie stood up, his massive proportions outlined against the amber-coloured sky. Although barely thirty, he had acquired a certain dignity of deportment, an air of maturity, in curious contrast to blooming cheeks and shining eyes. This aspect is not uncommon in young clergymen who take themselves seriously. Looking at Archibald Samphire, one might predict that in a few years he would assume the solidity of a pillar of the Church. Already, in the eyes of the spinsters in and around Westchester Close, he was regarded as a staff upon which the weak might safely and gratefully lean; already, when he gave an opinion, soft eyes gazed upward suffused with moisture.

He began to declaim Mark's peroration in a slow, impressive voice, the kind of voice which seems to fill the corners of the soul with echoes at once strange and familiar. The late Mr. Gladstone possessed such a voice. Mark stared at his brother, absorbing every note and gesture. What aptitudes were his for such a part. Listening to him, the younger brother forgot that he had written the phrases which fell with sonorous significance upon the silence of the fields. He was able to judge of what he had done, as if he were hearing the sermon for the first time. Playwrights experience this bitter-sweet pleasure. Lines laboured at for many an hour, become in the mouth of a great actor or actress so changed, so sublimated by the touch of genius, as to prove unrecognisable, even as a child of peasants adopted by persons of rank may so dazzle the eyes of its mother that it appears for the moment as a stranger. And who shall interpret that same mother's feelings when she sees lavished upon her darling gifts beyond her power to bestow—gifts which serve as symbols of her loss and another's gain?

Mark Samphire listened to his brother with ears lacerated by envy; and because devils tore him he was the more determined to exorcise them, in the hope that what he did and said might hide what he felt. When Archie finished, the younger brother sprang up and seized his hand.

"From the bottom of my soul," he exclaimed, "I believe that this voice of yours will be heard not only in Westchester, but in every cathedral in England."

Archie answered, dully, "If you had my voice, Mark——"

”Ah!” gasped Mark, ”if—if——” He paused, and ended quietly, ”We need not speak of that.”

”You could read this sermon.”

”Even that is denied me. I can read the lessons or anything else save what I write myself. Oh, I have tried and tried. Always the lump comes in my throat—and I hear the laugh of that girl. You remember?”

Archie nodded, betraying his sympathy with a shudder. ”It was awful,” he said, ”awful.”

He handed the sheets of manuscript to Mark, adding, ”It has helped me enormously. I will avail myself of some of your ideas.”

”You will redrape my ideas with your words.”

”I couldn’t use yours, you know.”

Mark gazed abstractedly at the cathedral; then he turned to his brother.

”Look here—I give it to you. Do what you like with it. I can’t preach it myself. It’s not b-b-bad.”

He paused as the stammer seized him. ”Not bad?” echoed Archibald. ”Why it’s splendid—splendid!”

”And why shouldn’t I help you—my brother?” His voice softened, as he stretched out his thin hand and touched Archibald’s mighty arm. ”Take it!”

Archie hesitated, staring inquiringly at Mark. Mark had always been such a stickler for plain-dealing. Then he remembered what Billy had said: ”Take what he gives, *generously*, and so you will best help him to play his part in life.”

Mark, meantime, was reflecting that he should like to read in Betty’s face the recognition of talents which he was not allowed to proclaim to the world.

”Take it,” he repeated. ”And, look here, I shall sit beside Betty Kirtling, and afterwards I shall tell her that I wrote it and persuaded you to preach it. No one else shall know.”

Archie, unable to determine the ethics of the matter, sensible in a dull, inarticulate way that he ought to say NO, said—YES. His own sermon was inadequate; there was not time to prepare another; and he lacked the power of interpreting the message of those grey stones yonder. This and more flitted through a mind large enough but somewhat conventionally furnished.

”But what has Betty Kirtling to do with it?” he concluded heavily. ”Why tell her? If this is to be between you and me, Mark—why tell her?”

Mark put up his hand to hide a smile.

”It may not be necessary to tell her,” he said quietly. ”She might guess.” Then seeing consternation on Archie’s fine brows he added: ”No one else will guess, but she—well, she has intuitions.”

”Is she going to marry Kirtling?”

Again Mark smiled at his brother’s lack of perception. He fenced with the

question: ”You ought to know; you’ve seen more of her than I have.”

”She’s a bit of a flirt.”

”No.”

”I say—yes. She has flirted with Kirtling, with me, with Pynsent, with Jim Corrance, and with you. I sometimes think that she likes you best, Mark. She might take you, because——”

”Go on!”

”Because,” Archie explained, ”there are two Bettys: the Betty of Mayfair and the Betty of King’s Charteris. I heard Mrs. Corrance say that, and it struck me as worth remembering. Most women would only see the Betty of Mayfair, but the other Betty, who takes some finding, has an extravagant admiration of good and a morbid horror of evil. A girl running from evil is likely to rush into the arms of good. I saw my chance there,” he added thoughtfully, and again Mark smiled. ”I said to myself that the time to catch the witch was just after the London season. I don’t mind telling you that I asked her to marry me the day she came back from Goodwood last year. And I was careful about choosing the right place. Depend upon it that tells in these affairs. I chose the Dean’s garden: there isn’t a sweeter, more peaceful spot under Heaven. But I wasted my time. Hullo! what’s the matter?”

”Nothing.”

”You’re white as a sheet. You ought to take more care of yourself, my dear fellow. I do Sandow’s exercises every morning and evening. And I take a grain of calomel once a week. You look liverish. I find that my mind does not work properly unless my body is in tiptop condition. What were we talking of? Oh, yes—Betty Kirtling. Do you know that Harry Kirtling has proposed about five times—generally out hunting? But she laughs at him. She cried in the Dean’s garden.”

”Ah?” said Mark softly.

”She won’t laugh or cry when the right man speaks, and if you are he the sooner you speak the better. She’s an enchantress,” Archie concluded, ”and her money would come in very handy—wouldn’t it?”

”Confound her money!” said Mark violently.

CHAPTER XV

APHRODITE SMILES AND FROWNS

When Betty met Mark just before dinner the story of the Bagshots was told briefly.

"Is that why you look so discouraged?" she whispered.

He laughed, not quite naturally.

"Surely to—to me, you may show your true feelings. Or do you count me a fair-weather friend?"

Before he had answered Lady Randolph came up and said that Mark must be introduced to the lady he was destined to take into dinner. Mark found himself bowing before an ample matron who prattled of herbaceous borders and conifers for nearly half an hour. Betty sat beside him, listening to Jim Corrance. Not till the first entrée was handed did she find an opportunity to repeat her question to Mark: "Am I a fair-weather friend?"

Mark met her glance; then before answering, he allowed his eyes to rest upon her gown and the opals at her throat. She was wearing a frock of filmy tissues, made, so her dressmaker informed her, in Tokio, and known to the fashionable world as rainbow tulle. The general effect of this gown, like the jewels which glittered above it, was that of change, and Betty had christened it the Chameleon, because in certain lights it was softly pink, in others a misty blue, in others, again, amber or palest green. Lady Randolph smiled when she saw this wonderful frock, because it suggested certain phases of character of the girl who wore it. Mark, knowing nothing of the relationship between a woman and her clothes, was, none the less, aware that this gown must have cost a deal of money and had not been chosen for wearing qualities.

"You make one think of May," he replied.

"You look at my frock, not at me. Well, if it comes to that, I have a stout tweed upstairs, which defies hurricanes. I know what you're thinking—and you're wrong. I prefer my Harris tweed, but you don't expect me to wear it in May—do you?"

"Contrast tickles you, Betty."

"How am I to take that?"

"You like an ice with a hot sauce."

"No doubt, *you* prefer fried fish."

She glanced at him roguishly, leaning slightly towards him, so that the sleeve of her gown touched his coat. From the airy tissues floated a faint fragrance of roses, and then, drowning it in pungent fumes, came that sickening odour of the slums.

"I loathe fried fish," he whispered. Betty smiled as the lady on the other side of Mark asked him if he knew Father Dolling. Nor was Stepney mentioned again, although it obscured the future in yellow fog. Betty was conscious that Mark eyed her with a persistency for which she could not quite account. The same

expression may be found on the faces of emigrants setting sail for a new country, yet looking back on the old, which holds all they know of life and which they may not see again. Betty had never set foot on the deck of an emigrant ship; but she was vaguely apprehensive that this persistency of glance was ominous. Her bosom was heaving when she asked him: ”Why do you look at me so queerly?”

”I beg your pardon.”

”Why should you? You must know by this time that I don’t object to being looked at—by you.”

If the words were slightly flippant, the tone in which they were spoken was serious enough. She continued: ”Your look is that of a man hesitating to leap. When you were a boy you went free at your fences.”

Mark caught his breath. Her meaning was unmistakable. She held out white arms to him—the syren!

”They were dear old days,” he murmured.

”You rode hard and straight. Many a lead you gave me. When are we going to have a nice long talk?”

Her voice was trembling. And he stammered as he replied: ”T-to-night, if you l-l-like.”

”It will be heavenly on the terrace,” she whispered. ”I saw you slip away last night, and I was tempted to follow you.”

”Why didn’t you?” he blurted out. Last night—he was reflecting—he had been free.

”I have some pride, Mark. Not much, perhaps.”

”I saw Aphrodite by moonlight. She was wonderful.”

”She is wonderful,” Betty murmured. ”Is love dead that you use the past tense? Will you take me to the fountain after dinner?”

”Yes.”

A minute later Lady Randolph and the ladies left the dining-room. Mark poured himself out a glass of port. The men were talking of the approaching meeting at Ascot, where one of Lord Randolph’s horses was likely to win the Gold Vase. Mark listened to Harry Kirtling’s eager voice. How keen he was, this handsome lad! What a worshipper of horse and hound! And his host—old man of the world who had drunk of many cups—seemed to covet this gold vase as the one thing desirable. And when he had won it, the cup would glitter upon his sideboard among a score of similar trophies unnoticed and forgotten.

”I have the sermon almost by heart,” Archie whispered to his brother. ”I read it over three times before dinner. It’s odd your treatment of the theme did not occur to me, particularly as I live in the Close.”

”One doesn’t see the Matterhorn when one is climbing it,” Mark observed. ”If you want to love Westchester live in Whitechapel.”

”I couldn’t live in Whitechapel,” Archie replied; ”it wouldn’t suit me at all. Still, as a means to an end—Lord Randolph says that you—er—know what you’re at.”

”Do I?” said Mark. Then he laughed and struck his brother genially on the shoulder, adding: ”At any rate, you know what you’re at; but to men like me ignorance of the ultimate aim has its value. Perhaps because I don’t quite know what I’m doing I take pleasure in doing it.”

”You’re a queer chap,” said his brother, ”and you grow queerer as you grow older. You mean that you would sooner have two birds in the bush than one in the hand.”

”The nightingales in the bush—for me,” cried Mark.

”I want the bird in the hand,” said Archibald solemnly.

”You will cook your bird, old fellow, and eat it with all accessories: bread sauce, rich gravy, the succulent *salade Romaine*, but you will never hear it sing. A bird in the hand never sings.”

The night was very still when Mark and Betty descended the stone steps which led to the fountain: a lovers’ night, fragrant with a thousand essences. Silvery shafts of moonlight pierced the darkness of the park, and fell tenderly on the nymphs about the fountain. But Aphrodite was not yet revealed, for her pool lay in shadow guarded by sentinel yews and cypress.

Mark disappeared for a moment; the surface of the pool was troubled; then, with a soft, sibilant sound, the waters rose and enveloped the goddess.

”We are in the nick of time,” whispered Mark.

As he spoke the moon topped the trees. For a moment a white flame seemed to sparkle round the brows of Aphrodite; then the features were revealed: the languorous half-opened eyes, the dimpled cheeks, the adorable mouth with its shy smile. The sculptor had suggested the admixture of fear and delight, a shrinking from the embrace of the unknown element, a virginal protest indicated by a gesture of taper fingers and slender shoulders, a protest overpowered by a subtle relaxing of the whole body, the nymph surrendering herself to Life and Love.

Mark turned to Betty. She met his eyes and then turned aside her own. The nymph with the phorminx smiled. And the *amorini* looked on approving. Mark had the hunger of Romeo on his thin face, the hunger of the beggar who has seen white loaves through the windows of a baker’s shop. At Milan there is a hole in the wall whence, long ago, unhappy prisoners looked out upon tables spread with savoury viands: wretches condemned to starve—within sight and smell of baked meats and sparkling wines!

Mark looked again at Betty’s face, now pensive, although the dimples were

deepening. The elusive tints of the gown, transmuted by the moonbeams into a silvery radiance, shimmered like the watery tissues of the goddess; the opals at her throat might have been dewdrops.

"Dear Betty," he whispered.

She lifted her heavy lids. The eyes beneath were dark as the shadows cast by the cypress, and troubled as the waters of the pool. What darkened and troubled them? What intuition or premonition of sorrow and suffering? But Mark saw the underglow which reflected the flames of his heart.

As they gazed at each other the moon glided discreetly behind a cloud, and a soft darkness obscured all things, out of which came the music of the fountain; a symphony of kisses falling with melodic rhythm upon the face of Aphrodite. In a clump of syringa beyond the Italian garden a nightingale trilled.

He knew that he had only to speak the word, to hold out his arms, and she would come to him. She was smiling, but with a sadness which underlay joy: such sadness as may be seen sometimes in the face of a child, who, coming into possession of a long-desired object, is confronted with the possibility of losing it.

He took her hand, gripping it.

"Mark—what is the matter?"

Her voice rose in a crescendo of distress, as Mark staggered, gasping for breath. Terror-stricken, she supported him to a stone bench hard by, upon which he sank.

"It is a p-p-passing weakness," he stammered. "I am better already."

"You have been overworking yourself in those detestable slums," she said vehemently.

"That is the truth," he answered. "I shall take a holiday."

"A long holiday," she whispered, meeting his eyes. But he saw the face of the tall thin doctor and his lean hand raised in protest. "And you must have someone, some dear friend, to look after you."

Her fingers pressed his arm.

"Yes," he said eagerly. "With such a friend I should grow strong again."

"There are places, earthly paradises, which I've read about. In Samoa or Tahiti——"

He interrupted her, passionately.

"Don't speak of them—*yet.* Betty, I must turn the key of the fountain. I cannot speak for—for a few days. Do you understand? If you could read my heart. If—if——"

She saw that his excitement was overmastering him.

"Mark, I do understand. We understand each other. You are right. The key of the fountain must be turned. I'll do it, not you." She sprang up lightly, ran to the cypress, and turned the key. When she came back he was staring at the

goddess, white and shivering.

Before she went to bed, Betty was cross-examined by Lady Randolph.

"Then he hasn't actually spoken?"

"He will," Betty declared. "And within a week."

"And Stepney?"

"I'd sooner live with him in Stepney——"

"And eat fried fish?"

"And smell fried fish—it's the smell I hate—than live in a garden of roses by Bendemeer's stream with anybody else."

"My poor Betty, you have the disease badly."

Betty, however, did not mention Mark's physical weakness to her friend. Instead, she prattled of love for nearly an hour.

The elder woman told herself that she was listening to an idyll; but, vividly as the tale was presented, a sense of unreality pervaded it; the conviction that, as a child would put it, the story was too good to be true. But because of its goodness Lady Randolph was the more touched by it. Your honest cynic respects good, although he rails against its counterfeit. Moreover, in this joyous acclamation of love, Lady Randolph resumed for a few moments her own youth. It seemed incredible that she should have grown old, and critical, and distrustful. Love touched her with healing fingers, and she became as a little child, free from the dull limitations of age and experience.

"You have been so sympathetic," said Betty, when she bade her old friend good night, "but I know, of course, that in your heart of hearts you think us two fools."

"Not fools, Betty. Babes in the wood, perhaps, playing amongst the rose leaves. Good night, my dear; go and dream of your lover."

But when the door was shut, the woman of the world sighed, and her shrewd face puckered into many wrinkles.

"Am I a fool?" she asked herself. "Should I have stopped this? I fear that it will come to nothing, but then it will be everything, everything, everything to them—while it lasts."

Meantime, Archibald was in Mark's bedroom, talking of the sermon to be preached on the morrow. He had a score of unessential corrections to suggest. A slight amplification here, another word there, an apt quotation, revealed the student of effect, the rhetorician. Mark admitted that his brother had improved the manuscript.

"I have thought of nothing else," said Archie. "At first I disliked preaching another man's sermon, but now I feel as if a lot of it were mine."

"It is all yours," said Mark, smiling. "I have given it to you, haven't I? Only, remember, Betty must know."

”Why?” demanded Archie. ”Women will talk and——” he shrugged his broad shoulders. ”If the Dean heard of it—— The Dean, you know, is civil, but he has a cut-and-dried manner which I find rather trying. He’s a radical, too. We always have had radical deans at Westchester. With my political views, my faith in institutions, and—er—so forth he is not in accord. He told me with really amazing candour that I owed my preferment entirely to my vocal chords. I should have thought a Samphire of Pitt had claims, but no—he repudiates all that. His own father was quite obscure: a bookseller, I’ve been told, only don’t quote me. One can’t be too careful in a cathedral town. Well, not to put a fine point on it, the Dean underrates me. I’ve felt it keenly. When I was singing to him the other night, in his own drawing-room, he went to sleep: he did, indeed. Still, to give him his due, he is almost a monomaniac on the subject of the cathedral, and this sermon ought to surprise him….”

Mark nodded absently. His face seemed thinner and paler since he had parted from Betty less than an hour ago. As in a dream, he heard Archie’s voice droning on about the Dean and his Chapter, but he saw only Betty’s face, Betty’s eyes, which seemed to fill the universe. She loved him! Infirm of body, halting of speech, he had been able to inspire passion in so splendid a fellow-creature. The glory of it filled his soul.

Archie, who must not be blamed for enjoying the sound of his own voice, talked on and on. It was past midnight. Down in the smoking-room young Kirtling, one could wager, was holding forth on the subject of fox-hunting. Jim Corrance, with an ironical smile upon his slightly melancholy face, was listening politely, thinking, no doubt, of some future ”coup” in the money market. Lord Randolph, with a long, thin cigar in his mouth, was certainly alive to the possibility of a political crisis. Pynsent, watching the three other men from the depths of an immense chair, was busy fitting their faces into a picture. All this, and much more, passed through Mark’s mind.

”Good night,” Archie was saying. ”We’ve had a long yarn, haven’t we?”

He stood up, extending his hand, which Mark grasped. Opposite to the brothers stood a large cheval glass. Mark’s eye fell on this, and straightway the gracious image of Betty vanished, and in her place he saw himself and Archie standing beside each other with linked hands. The contrast between the brothers was so startling that the younger allowed an exclamation to leap from his lips.

”Look,” he said, when Archie lifted his handsome brows in interrogation; ”who would believe that the same mother bore us?”

The mirror, indeed, seemed to take pleasure in making more of Archibald and less of Mark than was warrantable. The fine massive figure, the smooth, fresh-coloured cheeks, the flaxen curls of the one accentuated the leanness, the pallor, the fragility of the other. Only when you looked at the eyes you recognised

the vitality of spirit in Mark. Lady Randolph described the eyes of the brothers aptly enough, when she said that Mark's reminded her of fire and Archie's of—water.

”You will fill out,” said Archibald, placidly regarding the curves of his person.

Mark laid his fingers upon his brother's chest.

”Forty-three inches,” said Archie. ”I had a doctor look me over the other day. He said I was as sound a specimen as he'd ever examined.”

”Good night,” said Mark abruptly.

When Archie had left the room, Mark returned to the mirror.

”Am I envious?” he muttered. ”Not for my own sake, God knows, but for hers. If I were only strong——”

He began to undress, thinking of the doctor and the train. Curiously enough the two were connected. The train rushing on and on through the quiet landscape, the doctor and he whirled on with it, fellow-passengers for a few brief minutes, meeting, parting, and meeting again in obedience to some Power who rules that good shall triumph ultimately over evil. To Mark this was and always had been a sheet-anchor. At Harrow, at Barbizon, in the pulpit of the church in King's Charteris, he had submitted to the Divine Will; but, now, if the greatest thing on earth were denied him would he be able to bow his head in resignation? Every pulse in his body throbbed a passionate—”No.”

CHAPTER XVI
WESTCHESTER CATHEDRAL

It happened that Lord Randolph was anxious to consult the Dean of Westchester upon some point of municipal philanthropy, so he drove into the town earlier than usual on Whit-Sunday. Archibald accompanied him, Lord Randolph driving his own pair, which were never driven by anybody else. When the horses were working well into their collars, Lord Randolph turned to the preacher-elect and described, not without humour, his own pangs before the delivery of an important speech in the House of Commons.

”Only I,” he concluded, ”had the impending horror of a scathing reply from the other side. You black-coated gentlemen have an immense advantage there, an advantage which I hope you, my boy, will never abuse. Is it indiscreet to ask

what theme you have taken?"

Archie answered the question by repeating a phrase of Mark's, which summed up, aptly enough, the scope and purpose of the sermon. Lord Randolph raised his grizzled brows.

"Um! I like to see a young man tackling a subject bigger than himself: and the bigger the man, the bigger ought to be his subject. Often," he concluded abruptly, "it is the other way. You are ambitious, Archibald?"

"Yes," the minor canon confessed; and then, afraid of saying too much, he held his tongue. Lord Randolph respected his silence, supposing that the preacher was occupied with his thoughts. Nor did he mention that he expected to meet the Prime Minister at the deanery, who doubtless would attend service in the cathedral. If this young fellow acquitted himself with distinction, his sermon might prove a stepping-stone to great things. A week ago no man knew that a maker of prelates was coming to Westchester, certainly not the Dean, otherwise he might have elected to preach himself. Lord Randolph smiled with a slightly cynical curl of the lip. The Dean, as has been said, was radical in politics, but he probably foresaw that his party, now in power, was not likely to endure for ever.

Lord Randolph left his horses in charge of the groom, and descended at the ancient gate which leads to the Close. At the same moment two figures emerged from the shadows of the deanery porch. "There is the Prime Minister," said Lord Randolph. "I shall have pleasure, Archie, in introducing you to him."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young man.

A moment later the most eloquent speaker in the kingdom was holding Archibald Samphire's hand and peering into his face. The great man had appreciation of physical beauty, and an eye for a personality. Archie blushed: a tribute ever welcome to genius.

"Our preacher to-day," said the Dean.

"Indeed?"

The young man's hand was retained in the ample grasp of the Prime Minister, who asked a dozen questions, enveloping Archie with that magnetic current, which seemed to emanate from him in fuller measure than from any other of his generation.

"I shall look forward to your sermon," he concluded. "I am sure it will be worthy of this place"—he spoke with solemnity—"and"—his voice changed—"and of—you. You have the gift of eloquence: the lips, the eyes, the brow. I hope we shall meet again soon."

He passed on, smiling genially, leaving the gratified Archie alone with his thoughts. Lord Randolph might have told him that the speaker scattered seed of kindly words wherever he went, and who shall say—even now—what they brought forth? A kindly word lingers in the ear when a kind action may be lost

to sight.

The party from Birr Wood entered the cathedral some five minutes before the time when service began. Betty knelt down to repeat the prayer which she had learnt when a child from Mrs. Corrance. She was about to rise, when she happened to steal a glance at Mark kneeling beside her. At that moment she became sensible of what may be termed spiritual giddiness. She seemed to be transported to heights where head and heart failed. A glimpse of the world unseen was vouchsafed her: an empyrean in which she and Mark moved alone amongst the hosts of Heaven. The vision was so vivid, so seizing (to use the word in its French significance) that she felt herself trembling beneath the awe and mystery of it. And then an impulse, which, in its material aspect, had assailed her once before when attempting to scale a certain peak in the Alps, constrained her to look down into what seemed a fathomless abyss. In the mist and shadows of this vast gulf a dull, opaque object challenged attention, and she knew this was the earth: a pin's point in the celestial horizon, borrowing aught it possessed of light and heat from the place wherein she stood. And with this knowledge fear became articulate. The horror of giddiness which paralysed her was not due to the fact that she had been whirled to heights, but to the sense that she might fall headlong from them!

The deep notes of the organ put to flight the vision. Still kneeling, she looked upward into the roof of the chancel, with its delicately carved and gilded ornaments, thence passing to the radiance and simplicity of the nave beyond. Above her head, upon the stone partitions on each side of the sanctuary, stood six carved and gilded mortuary chests, surmounted by the crowns and inscribed with the names of the Saxon princes whose crumbling bones they contain; at her feet almost was the tomb of a great king, slain in the plentitude of his strength and power; hard by were the magnificent chantries of the prelates who sanctified their time, their talents, and their money to the embellishment of this house of God. In one of the chantries, where during his lifetime he spent, daily, many hours of devotion, lies the figure of a man, represented as an emaciated corpse wrapped in a winding-sheet. He it was who caused to be carved on the soaring roof of the choir the sorrowful emblems of our Lord's Passion: the crown of thorns, the nails, the hammer, the scourge, the reed and sponge, the lance, the cross. And who can doubt that he was inspired to so exalt these symbols of the suffering which redeemed mankind? Who can doubt, gazing at the shrunken limbs and careworn features of the prelate, that his untiring labour had caused him innumerable hours of pain serenely endured because he knew that by pain alone Man is purified. He and his successors and predecessors, and the armies of

masons they employed, had lived and died that this, the work of their heads and hands, might endure for generations, a monument of the faith which can move mountains of stone and change them into forms of surpassing loveliness. Had they laboured in vain?

Betty rose from her knees as the choir entered the sanctuary. At the same moment Mark touched her arm and glanced across the chancel. Following his eyes, she saw the familiar face of the Prime Minister. Other eyes lingered upon that notable head, now bent in meditation upon the tomb of the king. Mark touched her again. Archibald Samphire was passing by, stately in surplice and hood. The statesman raised his head, and stared keenly at the priest. A half-smile of recognition and encouragement curved his thin lips. Archie, conscious, perhaps, that the eyes of the mighty were on him, looked neither to right nor left. His face was as that of a graven image. "He is cold," thought Betty. "Does he expect, I wonder, to warm others?"

The service began. At that time a certain boy was singing in the Westchester choir who became famous afterwards as the finest treble of his day, combining, till his voice broke, the freshness of youth with the art which crowns a long and patient apprenticeship. Already musical folk were talking of the lad and coming from far to hear him. The choir sang in unison the first verse of the *Venite*, but above their voices, above the sonorous peal of the organ, floated the aerial notes of the boy. So sublimated was the quality of this child's voice that Betty—and many another—looked up, believing for the moment that these flakes of melody were dropping from heaven. The joyousness which informed each crystalline phrase electrified the ear. This indeed was a clarion call to rejoice! The pain and perplexity in Betty's soul fled, exorcised by this glad spirit, blythe as a skylark carolling in the skies. She glanced at Mark. His eyes were shining, his face aglow with pleasure. Farther down stood Harry Kirtling, unmoved; and on each side were rows of men and women, some perfunctorily praising God, others gazing with lacklustre eyes into the past or future, a few touched to the quick by the message and the instrument by which it was conveyed. Amongst these, one face stood out of the crowd, conspicuous by its pallor and the lines of suffering which scored cheek and mouth and brow. Unmistakably, Death had marked this victim of an incurable malady for his own. Yet, excepting Mark's, no countenance in that great congregation revealed more clearly the happiness and contentment which proclaim success. Here was the vitality of the life immortal flaming upon the ashes of the dead; here was one rejoicing in the salvation of a soul, caring nothing because the body was about to be destroyed!

The choir sang on together till the eighth verse was reached:

"To-day, if ye will hear His voice,

Harden not your hearts!"

These lines were delivered in *recitativo* by the basses, and then repeated by

the choir. "*Harden not your hearts!*" The injunction rolled down the aisles and transepts; it broke in thunder against the hoary walls, as it has broken for two thousand years against the faithless generations; and then, in the silence which followed, there descended a flute-like echo, emphasising the opportunity and reimposing the condition. To-day, this moment, *if* ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts!

Psalms and Lessons succeeded. Archie read the latter. Betty, who had not heard him read since his appointment as minor canon, amended her conviction that he could not warm others. He had that persuasiveness of diction which drapes even the crude and commonplace with samite, and, so garbed, passes like an angel through all doors.

"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

If this indeed were true, how many of those around Betty Kirtling were of the quick, how many of the dead? How many, again, were asleep, lulled to slumber by indifference? She saw Pynsent staring at Archie's face. Unconsciously he had raised his right hand, as if it held a brush poised above a canvas. Beside him sat Jim Corrance engrossed in thought. Jim was frowning; his lips were shut, as if he feared that information of commercial value might leak from them. It struck Betty, with a certain poignant suddenness, that Jim, dear old Jim, had lost his look of youth, and she wondered vaguely whether or not his mother had marked the loss—and regretted it. Was his face becoming hard? Was it setting into that inexorable mask of death of which the apostle spoke? She shivered and looked away, meeting the curious gaze of Lady Randolph. Then with an effort she restrained her vagabond thoughts and eyes, and listened attentively to the voice of the reader.

Afterwards she wondered if what followed would have impressed her so profoundly had it not been for what went before. At the moment she was merely sensible that her perceptive and intuitive faculties were sharpened to keen edge. She knew with conviction that a veil had been lifted, that she saw clearly and in true proportion what was vital and everlasting.

When Archie ascended the pulpit, Betty prepared herself for an anti-climax, Lady Randolph, for a nap. "*Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house.*" The preacher repeated his text, and paused. The Prime Minister inclined his ear in a gesture familiar to all who knew him; the Dean polished his spectacles and replaced them, as if seeking to see more clearly what hitherto had been obscured.

Silence, always significant, suffused itself throughout the cathedral!

The sermon began as a history of the cathedral, presented with a dramatic sense of the relation borne by Gothic architecture to the renaissance of spirituality in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But soon the preacher passed from the sanctuary in which he stood straight to the hearts of the congregation. It has been well said that neither writer nor painter lives who can set forth adequately on paper or canvas what such artists as Wykeham and Fox expressed in stone. And who dares to portray the house spiritual: the house hewn out of living stones under the direction of the Supreme Architect? But if the whole transcends description, the parts invite it. Archibald paused before taking the stride from the abstract to the concrete. When he spoke again his voice was troubled. Smooth persuasiveness gave place to a rougher eloquence. So far, admirable and inspiring though the sermon had been, it revealed rather the scholar and idealist than the practical man of the world. The cathedral, for instance, interpreted the past. It enshrined the faith and patience of yesterday. What message did it hold for the strivers of to-day?

Archie answered that question in the last half of the sermon, and, answering it, displayed a knowledge of humanity which Mark had gleaned in Stepney and Whitechapel. All that is affecting and pathetic in life was laid bare, but with a delicacy of phrase, a poignancy of suggestion, a sense of proportion, which thrilled rather than dismayed. A sane optimism informed even deformity. It was characteristic of Mark (and most uncharacteristic of the preacher) that he dwelt tenderly upon the inglorious parts of the temple: the rough flints, the bricks, the clay, the mortar! Of the glittering ornaments he said little, of the stone which the builders rejected much. His congregation listened with an attention which never waned. The children stared spellbound at the splendid figure in the pulpit. To them, as to their elders, came the assurance of work to do worth the doing, and the conviction that such work, however slight, brought with it a reward: the Pentecostal gift. Here Mark had attempted to define the unpardonable sin: the rejection of the spiritual and the acceptance of the carnal life. And then followed the apostrophe. When it was delivered, smiles curved the children's lips; men felt the current of their blood flowing strong and free in their veins. For a sound as from heaven had filled the house where they were sitting, and gladness of heart scourged once more from God's temple disease and despair and death!

After the service, the Dean took Archie's hand and congratulated him. "You have spoken with tongues," he said, in his too cold voice, which impressed but never thrilled. Archibald hesitated, flushed, clutched at opportunity and missed it. The Dean turned aside as others approached. To them Archie listened, wondering if

Betty knew. The Dean, watching him, amended previous estimates. ”The man is really modest,” he told his wife at luncheon. ”He blushed and stammered when I spoke to him.”

Archie went into the Close, accompanied by a prebendary, whom, as it happened, he had slight reason to dislike. As he left the cathedral he saw a small group: the Prime Minister, Lord Randolph, and Lady Randolph; Pynsent and Jim Corrance were standing beyond these. The Prime Minister acclaimed the preacher in Latin, holding out both hands:

”I salute Chrysostom,” and then he added simply: ”Thank you—thank you!”

Once more Archibald clutched at opportunity, but the prebendary, eyeing him with jealous glance, stood between him and confession. Then Lord Randolph and his wife, Pynsent and Corrance, swelled a chorus of felicitation. Archie was feeling that the truth must be written on his scarlet face. But his friends, like the Dean, attributed confusion to modesty.

”Here he is!”

Betty's voice rose above the chorus. Pynsent made way for her. Mark followed, looking pale and worn.

”Oh, Archie, what can I say?” Her face was radiant. He did not suspect that she wished to apologise for every idle jest at his expense, for every thought and word (and there were many) which now seemed to stain not him but her, the shallow-witted creature, seeing the ludicrous and blind to what lay beneath. ”I shall never chaff you again, never.”

Archie, however, was looking at Mark. At the moment he realised that unless he spoke, Mark would hold his peace. Mark had not told Betty yet. The group around him was breaking up. The Prime Minister had his watch in his hand. Lord Randolph had turned his back. Betty began again, excitedly:

”And I might have missed it. Aren't you going to shake hands with him, Mark?”

Silently Mark extended his hand. At his brother's touch Archie stammered out: ”I owe everything to Mark: he helped me; he has always helped me.”

Mark's eyes demanded more; his grasp tightened. The others, hearing but not understanding, shuffled somewhat impatiently. Betty frowned, wondering why Mark was so unresponsive. Surely he would say something. Then she remembered that since they left the south door of the cathedral he had said nothing. Was it possible that he grudged his brother this triumph? From any other man such jealousy would have provoked pity and sympathy, but she had loved and respected Mark because she had never been able to conceive of him as being mean or petty-minded. Yet, long ago, he had confessed that ambition was his besetting sin!

”We shall not be home till two,” said Lady Randolph. ”Come, all of you!”

She bustled away, followed by the others. Archibald dropped his brother's hand, and strode off in the direction of his lodgings. He would not join the party till after the afternoon's service. Betty glanced at Mark.

"You never congratulated him. He went away hurt, poor fellow! Mark—how could you? And it was your praise he wanted. I saw that. He looked hungrily—at you."

Then Mark laughed, while the shadows in Betty's eyes deepened. That she was perplexed he saw, that she was deeply distressed he had yet to learn. And to give him his due he was thinking at that moment not of Betty, nor of himself, but of Archie. He regretted that he had not told Betty the truth, but her admiration had been so great, her praise so extravagant, that he had shrunk from the assertive: "I did it. I wrote it." Now, if he spoke, Betty being a woman of likes and dislikes, would scorn his brother and make no effort to hide that scorn. All this whirled through his brain while he laughed, because she had misinterpreted the expression of hunger in Archie's eyes.

"Don't laugh!" she enjoined sharply. "Did you not think his sermon splendid?"

"It sounded better than I expected," he said, wondering if she would guess. He made so certain that she would guess. It amazed him that the lynx-eyed Lady Randolph, her sagacious lord, Pynsent, Corrance had been so easily befooled. He had yet to learn that the world is equally prone to believe that a fool may prove a sage as a sage a fool. The unexpected excites and disturbs the reason.

"We have all underrated him," she rejoined, more gently.

At tea-time Lord Randolph returned to Birr Wood, bringing Archibald with him. After tea Lord Randolph drew Mark aside and told him that the Prime Minister had asked many questions concerning the Samphires of Pitt.

"I told him," said he, "that your maternal grandfather had a strain of Wesley's and Sheridan's blood. It seems that he knew and loved him. He must have been a remarkable man."

"My mother adored him," Mark replied. "I can just recall some of the things she said about him."

"Justice was not done him, I fear. He served faithfully ungrateful masters. Perhaps he ought to have been a preacher. At any rate his mantle seems to have descended upon your brother."

He moved away, wondering why Mark had shown so little enthusiasm.

Presently Lady Randolph, under cover of the chatter, said a few words:

"I account for our surprise this morning in one word: Inspiration. There was Goldsmith, for instance. Not that I wish to make comparisons. Archibald is no idiot to be sure, very much the contrary, still I never gave him credit for being a humourist."

"A humourist, Lady Randolph?"

"What? You missed the humour in his sermon—you? Why if I hadn't cried I must have laughed. What was the keynote of that sermon? Renunciation. Eh? The word was not mentioned. Very true, but it informed every phrase. It might have been written by a man who had failed in this world, but who knew that elsewhere his failure would be reckoned as success. The stone that the builders rejected became the head of the corner. Well, so far as this world is concerned, Archie has always succeeded. He has genius in being able to put himself in the place of the man who has failed."

"And the humour?"

"I am coming to that. I go the round of this huge house every Saturday morning, and the house-keeper will tell you that my eyesight is unimpaired. I went into your room, sir, and what did I see?"

"Spare me," said Mark.

"*Soit*! I went into your brother's room. I declare he has prettier things on his dressing-table than I have on mine. And well-cut boots in trees, eau de Lubin on his washstand, and on his chest of drawers—a trouser-press! Oh! there's no harm in such things, of course, but that sermon this morning and the trouser-press! The golden sandals—treed! The halo sprinkled with eau de Lubin! And yet, and yet he made me cry: hardened old sinner that I am! So I say that he is a genius, and an unconscious humourist, and a Chrysostom, and altogether a most amazing person. Now, go and talk to a younger woman."

Mark obeyed. His old friend eyed his thin figure as he crossed the room.

"How much help did he give his brother?" she muttered to herself.

Archie was surrounded by joyous prattlers. Harry Kirtling, Pynsent, and Jim Corrance were with Betty.

"We are still jawing about your brother's sermon," said Harry Kirtling. "I am sorry to say I missed the first part. A line from my stud groom this morning rather upset me. Dear old Trumpeter has navicular. My best gee—worst luck! Well, by Jove! that sermon cheered me up; it did, indeed. I felt confoundly ashamed of myself and my own small affairs. That was the effect it had on me. But Corrance and Pynsent say it made 'em blue."

"Every man worth his salt wants to be at the head of the procession here," Pynsent explained, in his slightly nasal New England accent.

"Archie stuck his knife into me and turned it," said Corrance.

"You've misinterpreted the whole thing," Mark replied eagerly. "Every man has his work here, but who knows what relation it may bear, if any, to the work which comes after? Great achievements dwindle into insignificance within a d-decade. Why, then, should we t-tear ourselves to p-p-p——"

Meeting Betty's eyes, the abominable lump came into his throat. He paused

abruptly, turning aside. Archie, who had joined them, said with authority:

"Mark is right. We make a mad effort to scribble our names upon the quicksands of time." (Mark, with his back still turned to the group, smiled.) "And we die wretched," Archie went on, "because Time's tides wash out our writing within an hour. This struggle after personal recognition is a certain sign of decadence in a nation."

Mark looked at Betty, who was listening to the speaker with faintly glowing cheeks. Pynsent and Corrance seemed to be impressed, because Archie as preacher (thus Mark reflected) had bewitched them. Yesterday, only yesterday, an obscure minor canon would not have so delivered himself; if he had, the others would have scoffed at him as a prig.

"Are we to fight without pay, my dear boy?"

Lord Randolph had approached, cynical, yet interested.

"Forlorn hopes were led before the Victoria Cross was given," murmured Archie deferentially. Then he remembered that Mark had said this, and that Mark was present. At this thought he blushed vividly, once more confirming an impression of modesty. He tried to make amends to Mark. "Why, Mark and I were speaking of this only last night. What did you say, Mark?"

"N-nothing worth r-repeating," stammered Mark.

"He said that a desperate enterprise never lacked men to attempt it. And what allures men to almost certain death? The pay, Lord Randolph? You would be the last to affirm that. Have we not heard of many a noble fellow falling, maybe, within a few feet of the goal, seeing with dying eyes comrades triumphantly scaling the heights, knowing that the success of those comrades was rooted in the bodies over which they had passed to victory? And these—the failures—have died with a glad shout upon their lips; they have been found horribly mutilated, but with a smile on their dead faces. Shall we pity such men, Lord Randolph, or envy them?"

Mark slipped from the room before Lord Randolph replied. Outside the door he discovered that his fists were clenched.

CHAPTER XVII

SURRENDER!

On the following Tuesday, when Mark reached Amos Barger's house, he was

told that the surgeon could not see him for a quarter of an hour. Mark followed a manservant into a back dining-room ponderously furnished with mahogany and horsehair. The paper on the wall was hideous in pattern and colour; the wainscoting was grained in imitation of oak; on the square table in the centre of the room lay the comic papers and some society weeklies, amongst them *Kosmos* and *Mayfair*. Under the latter was *The Bistoury*. Mark paced up and down, pausing now and again to look out of a window which commanded a prospect of dingy back-walls and chimney-pots. From the front of the house a charming glimpse of the trees in Cavendish Square redeemed the dull uniformity of the street. Mark had noticed how green was their foliage, recalling the fact that soot is as Mellin's food to the vegetable world. His fancy seized this fact and played with it. Soot, the most defiling of things, transmuted by some amazing process into a brilliant pigment! What a text for a sermon! Presently Mark approached the book-case—a solid, glazed affair as heavy, doubtless, as the works within. To his surprise, he found the lightest of fiction, and every volume showed signs of use. Barger, he reflected, was a wise man to laugh with Anstey and Frank Stockton, but he ought really to buy some new furniture. Then he remembered that Barger had admitted failure, more or less. Possibly, these grim Penates had been taken at a low valuation from the outgoing tenant. With these fugitive speculations he escaped from his own thoughts and fears.

When he went upstairs the surgeon, while shaking hands, eyed him keenly.

"I am the better for my holiday," said Mark.

Barger nodded, and pointed to a chair.

"You said in the train I might live to make old bones. Weakness of heart is not a bar to marriage—is it?"

"Very much the contrary," said the surgeon grimly. "And if you are sound in other respects——"

"I have never known what it is to be really ill," said Mark eagerly; "and I don't think I've had breakfast in bed since I left Harrow."

"And not often there—eh? Never shammed at school did you when the first lesson was a bit stiff?"

"The first lesson never was very stiff—to me," Mark replied.

Barger, with impassive face, began an examination, which lasted longer than Mark expected. At the end Mark said nervously: "The heart is not weaker than it was?"

"Your heart need not cause you any serious anxiety," said the surgeon slowly.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the young man. "From your face I feared a different verdict."

"There is other trouble, Mr. Samphire."

Then Mark smiled pitifully. His premonition of disaster was justified.

"You can speak f-f-frankly," he stammered.

The surgeon spoke frankly, making plain in his precise phraseology what was and what might be. "You will take another opinion," he concluded, "but it is not a matter of opinion, but of fact. These," he pointed to some reagents, "never lie. Doctors do—sometimes."

"I thank you for not lying to me," said Mark gravely.

Barger fumbled with his test tubes, and then burst out vehemently:

"Your only chance lies in the most careful diet, a life in the open air; and even then the issue is doubtful."

"And—marriage?"

"Out of the question."

"But if I got better? Should I be justified in asking a woman to wait?"

His voice was dry and husky. Barger shook his head. The trouble might be staved off for a time, hut there was always the probability of return.

"You have neglected your body," he said irritably. "You have defrauded it of all things essential, and it has taken its revenge. Oh, you parsons who think of others, why can't you see that you would serve the world better if you thought more of yourselves?"

Mark could read the sympathy and pity latent beneath frowns and irritability. He held out his hand. Barger continued:

"You must go to a physician. Yours is not a case for a surgeon. You might try Sir John Drax. He's a specialist. Shall I write him a note? He lives near here, in Welbeck Street."

Berger scribbled a few lines, and handed them to Mark.

"See him at once," he commanded; "suspense is unendurable."

Mark went his way, so blinded by misery that in crossing the street he barely escaped being run over by a big van. He sprang to one side in obedience to the instinct of self-preservation.

Within half an hour Sir John Drax had confirmed Barger's diagnosis and prognosis. Then he asked bluntly if his patient had independent means. An affirmative simplified the case. He, too, prescribed fresh air, simple food, and moderate exercise.

"If I stick to my work in Bethnal Green?"

"You will find yourself in Kensal Green."

"And marriage——?"

"Madness, my dear sir, madness!"

Mark climbed on to the top of the first 'bus which was rolling eastward. As he did so he heard a small boy proclaiming the name of a winner. The name seemed familiar. Then he remembered that it was one of Harry Kirtling's horses.

He could see Kirtling's square, stalwart body and the handsome sun-tanned face above it. Of all the bitter minutes in his life, this one seemed to be the bitterest.

When he reached the Mission, pressing work distracted his attention for some hours. He did it as thoroughly as usual, wondering what he should write to Betty when he was at liberty to go to his own room. He wondered also that his friends made no comment upon his appearance. Surely he carried scars. A small glass hung in the committee-room where he was sitting. He glanced at it. Outwardly he was unchanged.

Not till the clock struck nine did he find himself alone. He wrote a letter to Betty, a long letter, which he read and destroyed. The next letter was short, curt, cold: he burned this also. A few minutes later, feeling pain in his hands, he discovered that his nails had lacerated the flesh. Then he knew that a fight for life and reason was beginning. The demons were crying "Surrender!" If he died to-night, Betty would be free; if he lingered on for half a dozen years, she might deem herself bond to a dying man. Virility repudiated such a sacrifice.

"O God," he cried, "let me die to-night!"

Outside, the world of Whitechapel roared in derision. All Mark had known of poverty, of vice, of squalor, swelled into a chorus of despair. Here, in the heart of the slums, in an atmosphere tainted by the dead bodies of hundreds of thousands who had perished cursing God and man, he felt that he was choking for fresh air, that the pestilential fumes of every evil place into which he had entered were destroying him.

He sat down limply on the edge of his bed, wondering whether the end would come soon, telling himself that he was dead already. At any rate his work was done; he would leave the Mission on the morrow. The animal instinct to slink off to some lonely spot where none might witness his misery became overpowering. But a letter to Betty must be written first. He crossed to his desk, where Betty's face smiled out of a silver frame. Gazing at this, he became so absorbed that three sharp taps on the door were unheeded. The Bishop of Poplar entered the room, pausing when he saw the head bent over the table, the thin fingers clutching the silver frame. He closed the door, crossed the room, and laid his hand upon Mark's shoulder.

"You are in sore trouble."

Mark started to his feet with an exclamation compounded of fear and surprise.

"You—David——?" he stammered. "What b-brought you here?"

"You shall answer that question yourself," said Ross gravely.

The men confronted each other. Great as the contrast was between the robust health of the one and the infirmity of the other, a critical eye might have detected a similarity in the two faces—a resemblance the stronger because it was

born of the spirit rather than the flesh.

”I was crossing Welbeck Street this afternoon,” said Ross, ”when I saw you leave one of the houses. It was in my mind to follow and speak to you, but I was hastening to an appointment for which I was late, and leaving town for Scotland at eight. But it happened that I had noted the number of the house you were leaving, and I looked it up in a directory on the platform at Euston. Mind you, my train was about to start, and I had taken my ticket, but when I found out that you had seen Drax, I guessed what had happened. I let the train go on without me, and came on here. Was it coincidence that led me into Welbeck Street this afternoon, or something more?”

”I am under sentence of death,” said Mark.

”Tell me all about it.” He grasped his friend’s hand.

Mark obeyed. ”She has always cared for me,” he concluded, ”always, you understand: ever since we were boy and girl. Many want her. Gorgeous insects have buzzed about her, but she flew to a poor drab-coloured moth. And I”—his voice shook—”I had fluttered about in the outer darkness——”

”Was it darkness, Mark?”

”I should have said twilight.”

”Then she was your sun?”

Mark paused before he answered slowly: ”God made the sun.”

”You try to slip by me,” replied the other quickly. ”Have I misread you? It seemed to me that you had ideals, standards, rules higher than the average, that for you the light shone more clearly, revealing what lay beyond. Was that light the glamour in a woman’s eyes?”

”The light was reflected in her eyes. You press me hard, David. Shall I plead that the light, no matter whence its source, dazzled me. There have been times when I seemed to see the other shore: an enchanted land, so desirable that I wondered why men preferred to linger here. But now”—his voice grew harsh and troubled—”I want this earth. I want to live and love—here.”

”What do you propose to do?” David asked.

”Do?” Mark laughed bitterly. ”What can I do, but die—the sooner the better? You are a strong man, David; it is hard for you to stand in my shoes; but if you were I you would surrender.”

”What?”

”Shall I say—everything.”

”You cannot surrender what you have done already, whether good or ill.”

”I have to surrender love,” Mark muttered. ”What do you know of that, David?”

”I loved a woman,” Ross replied, ”and I love her still, although she is but a memory”—his voice softened—”a memory of what might have been, and what

will be. And shall I say that this love has fortified me, because I see it as the reflection of a greater love? The love you talk of surrendering is an imperishable possession."

Mark said nothing.

Ross continued: "Drax is a great authority, but he does not know, as I know, that you have never given your body a fair chance. Now—my word to you is FIGHT. Fight for life, fight for health, fight to save yourself as you have fought tooth and nail to save others! Again and again I've begged you to go to my lodge in Sutherland. Go there with me to-morrow! Drax prescribes fresh air, plain food, complete rest. These may be straws, but clutch them—clutch them! Why, man, I have towed worse wrecks than you into dry dock, and I've seen 'em sail out of harbour with every stitch of canvas set staunch and seaworthy craft! Be my guest for six months! Mark, Mark, my dear, good, foolish, gallant Mark—*Fight!*"

"Thank you, David," Mark replied. Then the smile which Bagshot knew well lit up the thin haggard face, as he added slowly: "I d-d-don't think it was c-c-coincidence which led you into Welbeck Street this afternoon."

Next day Mark went North with David Ross. Before departure he wrote a letter to Betty, which successfully obscured the facts. He feared that Betty might insist upon appointing herself his nurse. And if she came to him, would he have strength to send her away? Once she had spoken shudderingly of a friend married to a hopeless invalid: a poor wretch lingering on, half dead, changing day by day into something unrecognisable in mind and body.

"You have the right," he wrote, "to demand an explanation, which I must give. I am and shall remain outside that garden into which we strayed last Saturday. What more can I say? Nothing. Try to think of me as a boy who was near and dear to you...."

The letter was filled up with details concerning his work. Reading it, the conclusion was inevitable that the writer had become absorbed in such work. He hinted at the possibility of taking a vow of celibacy.

Betty kissed this letter before she broke the seal, making sure that it was a love-letter. Then she read it, with perceptive faculties blunted by shock. Lady Randolph found her in the Italian garden, staring at the figure of Aphrodite.

"You were right," she exclaimed passionately. "Mark prefers his work to—me."

Lady Randolph kissed her.

"I have been a fool," said Betty, bursting into tears.

CHAPTER XVIII
ARIADNE IN NAXOS

Lady Randolph wisely said nothing, but she wrote to Mark. He replied by return of post.

"I love her devotedly, but I have an almost incurable disease: the result of neglect. Don't let my people know of this. I had the presumption to believe that the sacrifice of the flesh was a sort of burnt-offering to God. The folly of it is hard to bear. Many men here are in a like self-crippled condition, and the doctor in charge, a good sort, makes scathing remarks. David Ross warned me several times; as did his successor at the Mission. Betty, of course, must never find out the truth, which I could not withhold from you, my kind friend. You can best serve her and me by finding her a good, faithful husband, such a fellow as Harry Kirtling, or Jim Corrance.... She is made for the happiness which marriage brings. I can take comfort in the thought that another may give her what is not mine to offer."

Lady Randolph's eyes were wet, as she locked up this letter. Mark had not mentioned Archie as a possible husband. "That would break his heart," she muttered to herself.

Betty and she returned to London, where, during the month that followed, Betty's simulated high spirits and inordinate appetite for excitement provoked a warning.

"If you don't bend, you'll break."

"I am broken in pieces, like Humpty-Dumpty, who ought to have been a girl. Men don't break when they tumble off their castle walls. I've stuck myself together, but I'm a cracked vessel."

Lady Randolph wrote a note that evening to Mrs. Corrance. She had faith in the balsamic virtue of the atmosphere in and around King's Charteris, and she knew that Jim spent two days out of each week with his mother. Mrs. Corrance begged Betty to pay her a visit.

"Shall I go?" said Betty.

"I need a rest-cure," Lady Randolph replied pointedly.

So Betty went down into the pleasant Slowshire country, where the warmth

of her welcome gave the girl a curious thrill. The kisses of the gentle, grey-haired woman sounded deeps, although they could not touch bottom, for the motherless girl has deeps unplumbed by any fellow-creature. Tea was set out in the pretty old-fashioned drawing-room with its freshly calendered chintzes, its quaint Chelsea figures, its simple dignity of expression. Mrs. Corrance possessed some Queen Anne silver, which she had used daily ever since Betty could remember anything. It sparkled softly like the rings upon the white hands that touched it, shining with a subdued radiance of other days. Betty saw the same quiet glow in her old friend's kind eyes: the peace on the face of age which passes the understanding of youth.

Hitherto she had regarded Mrs. Corrance with grateful affection, but as one to whom the wind had been tempered, one who lived in a fold seeing little beyond save Jim. Betty had always thought of her as mother. Now, she found herself wondering what part this quiet lady had played as sweetheart and wife. Tempests might have raged and died down, before she (Betty) was born. Mrs. Corrance's mind, like her house, was full of charming nooks, cosy corners, so to speak, wherein a tired spirit might take his ease, but perhaps there were also bare chambers into which none was allowed to enter. Into these, if they existed, Betty felt a shameful curiosity to go.

While they drank tea Mrs. Corrance asked no questions. Betty listened with interest to an account of Jim and his doings in the markets of the world.

"He would like to instal me, me, my dear, in a fine house in some fashionable quarter." She laughed, and Betty laughed too, seeing that the mother was delighted secretly that her son should desire to lavish his wealth upon her.

"Do you despise the world, that you live out of it—always?" said Betty.

"I love the country," replied the elder woman evasively; then she added, as if the possibility had just occurred to her: "I hope you won't find it very dull here."

"Not with you," said Betty, slipping her hand into her friend's.

Next day, Mrs. Samphire drove over from Pitt Hall. She looked pinker and plumper than ever, and her hair—arranged in Madonna bands—gave her the vacuous expression of a stout Dutch doll. When the name was announced, Betty rose to fly, but Mrs. Corrance entreated her to remain. While Betty was hesitating, fearing the voluble tongue of Mark's stepmother, the lady herself bustled across the lawn to the chestnut tree beneath which Mrs. Corrance was sitting. In a moment the pleasant silences were shattered.

"How cool you look! And this is dear Betty Kirtling. We never expected to have the honour of seeing so smart a lady in our humdrum circles. Thank you, my poor husband is only so-so. The doctor has prescribed golf. We have laid out a small links in the park. I think golf such a charming game—don't you? I love

to look on at it. You agree with me, I'm sure."

Mrs. Corrance tried to lift this interjectional babble out of the rut.

"I suppose," she said reflectively, "that with us middle-aged women looking on at games is an inherited instinct. We have always looked on—haven't we? But Betty, I expect, likes to play golf."

Betty, however, unkindly said nothing, while Mrs. Samphire bleated: "Oh, yes, I do like to see the Squire play golf. Although, when he misses the ball, he does—well, I mustn't tell tales out of school—must I? How is dear Lady Randolph? Did you have a large party for Ascot? Was the Prince there? I have seen your name in the Marlborough House lists. Really, I wonder you speak to me at all."

"I haven't said much yet—have I?" said Betty. "Last time we met you were suffering horribly with neuralgia. Is it better?"

"I'm a martyr now to dyspepsia. I'm trying light and colour, Babbit, you know. If your poor, dear uncle were alive, how interested he would be. I'm wearing red next the skin."

"In July?" ejaculated Mrs. Corrance.

"And I've changed the paper in my boudoir, which used to be a depressing blue, to bright yellow. All the water I drink is acted upon by a red lens. I want Mark to read Babbit. He has had a sort of breakdown. You heard of it?"

"A breakdown?" exclaimed Betty. "Did you say a—breakdown?"

Light flashed upon her. Why had she not thought of this? Her thoughts crowding together clamoured so shrilly that she could barely hear Mrs. Samphire's querulous reply.

"We learned, quite by chance, that he was in a sanatorium in Sutherland. He ought to have come to Pitt Hall."

"Have you asked him?" said Betty in a low voice.

"He would come to us if he wanted us."

Shortly after Mrs. Samphire took her leave.

"Can Mark be seriously ill?" said Betty.

Mrs. Corrance's clear eyes lingered for a moment on Betty's flushed cheeks; then she said tranquilly: "It is not impossible. If so, I don't blame him for going to Scotland."

"He ought to be at Pitt Hall," said Betty. "I think I shall take a brisk walk."

Two days later Betty met the Squire in Westchester. She soon discovered that he was hurt because his son had not come home.

"Perhaps he was anxious to spare you—and others. That would be like him."

"Yes, yes; he's the best boy in the world. But I'm sure there's nothing serious the matter. We Samphires are as hard as nails."

"If he—died up there without making a sign."

The Squire stuttered and choked.

”God bless me! you alarm me. I must write at once. I shall insist on his coming home. Has he taken you into his confidence, my dear?”

”No.”

”Um! I thought once that—well, I shall write.”

Betty felt that her heart was beating.

”He will pay no attention to a letter. Why not go to him yourself, Mr. Samphire?”

”By God!—I will.”

Betty smiled faintly, for the Squire, when he set his mind to a thing, was easily turned aside.

Then she went her way; and Mrs. Corrance noted in her diary that Betty seemed quieter, more like her old self.

On the following Saturday Jim arrived from town, exhaling and exuding Capel Court. He strolled with Betty through lanes, where they had picked primroses and blackberries long ago; and the familiar trees and hedgerows stood like sentinels of the past, guarding simple joys, which Betty told herself could never return. Jim reminded her that a missel-thrush had built in the old pollard close to the village pound, and that the eggs, when about to be blown, proved addled.

”You were very keen about eggs,” she said.

”I've always been keen,” said Jim. ”By Jove!—it was a sell about those eggs. Well—I still collect eggs, and some are addled! That Cornucopia mine, for instance....”

He plunged into a description of a mining deal which had proved disastrous.

”But I got it back, and a lot more in six weeks.”

”Which excites you most—winning or losing, Jim?”

”One gets accustomed to winning,” said the successful speculator, ”but losing is heart-breaking, particularly when you are unable to guess what the loss will be.”

”Ah,” said Betty. ”What do you do with your gains?”

”Let 'em increase and multiply. The mater won't live in a better house, I mean a larger, and she refuses, in advance, all the presents that I've not given her.” He laughed, then he continued in a hard voice: ”That question of loss interests me.”

He looked at Betty, who slightly lowered her parasol and made no reply.

”I never forget my losses.”

”Because they have been few?”

”Because they have been heavy. The fellows in our market would tell you that I have a very serious failing: I don't know when to let go.”

”I call that a virtue: in a word, you don't know when you're beat.”

”No,” he said steadily. ”I don't know when I'm beat.”

A silence followed, during which the tamer of bulls and bears decapitated a few dandelions. Betty watched him out of the corner of her eye. A certain dexterity and ruthlessness in Jim's use of his cane had significance. Then she found herself wondering what Jim looked like when he was a boy. She could not recall her old playmate, being obsessed for the moment by the man beside her. Some men always retain the look of youth—Mark was one of these; others would seem to have been born old; many, like Jim Corrance, assume early a hard and impenetrable crust of middle age. Jim's face was thin and lined, although he had the square figure of an athlete. One could not picture him as a rosy-cheeked urchin, nor could one believe that he would grow feeble, and bent, and white-haired. And yet, despite his strength and success, Betty felt poignantly sorry for him. And being a woman she showed her compassion in a score of inflections, gestures, which were as spikenard to the man who loved her.

"I wonder you are so nice to me," he said presently; then as she raised her delicate brows he added quickly: "I've cut loose from so much you revere. It's a pill for the mater, but I couldn't play the humbug. I look at life as it is: as it appears, I mean, to me—a place where the devil takes the hindmost."

"And those in front——"

"Oh—I dare say the devil takes them also—later."

Betty changed the subject, not because it was distasteful, but for the subtler reason that she feared her own thoughts, which stuck in a slough of despond. For the rest of the walk they prattled gaily enough of the pranks they had played as boy and girl. Jim's face insensibly softened, so that Betty caught a glimpse of the Harrovian. Then, at the mention of Archie's name, the talk flowed back into the present.

"I never asked you what you thought of that wonderful sermon of his."

Jim admitted surprise. "Old Archie has come on," he added. "He's a plodder, and he's good to look at, and he means to 'get there.'"

"To get—where?"

"To the bench of bishops."

"I used to underrate Archie, but there's a lot in him."

"A lot of him, too. Oh—you needn't frown, Betty. I think that Archie makes a capital parson; and I dare say he'll personally conduct a select party of you Slowshire people to heaven."

"How bitter you are, Jim."

"I won't be bitter when I'm with you," he promised. "I say, there's the bush where we caught the Duke of Burgundy fritillary. I saw it in the old cabinet the other day. You nailed it with your hat and gave it to me, although you wanted it yourself. I felt a beast for taking it, but I adored you for being so unselfish."

"You offered me your Purple Emperor next day."

”And you refused it,” said Jim quickly.

”So I did. I must tell everybody that I have refused an Emperor.”

”Not to mention smaller fry. Three months ago I thought you meant to marry Harry Kirtling, and he thought so too, by Jove!”

”You dare to insinuate that I encouraged him?”

”You have a way with you, Betty.” He glanced at her ardently, but she looked down, faintly blushing, as he continued: ”You are not one of these modern young women who can stand alone.”

”That is true,” she said simply. ”I am not strong enough to stand alone, and I admire in men the qualities lacking in myself. We had better go home; your mother will be waiting for her tea.”

Jim said no more, but in the evening he asked his mother if she had any reason to suppose that an understanding existed between Mark and Betty.

”When she refused Kirtling, Pynsent and I made certain she was engaged to Mark. Now he has gone to the uttermost ends of the earth, and she never mentions his name to me.”

”Nor to me,” said Mrs. Corrance. Then she touched her son’s shoulder very gently. ”Do not make ropes out of sand, dear.”

Jim went back to town on Monday morning, but he returned to King’s Charteris the following Friday, and walked once more with Betty in the lovely woods which lie between Westchester and the New Forest. Naturally and by training an acute observer, although a keener judge of men than women, Betty puzzled him. He saw that she was slightly contemptuous of the material side of life, although willing to listen by the hour to his presentment of it. This, however, might be a phase, a mood. He felt assured, now, that Betty would have married Mark had he asked her to do so, and he lay awake at night wondering whether she would marry anybody else. For the rest he determined that he must make haste slowly. He would give the girl the fellowship she craved without defining its elements. That she was grateful for such abstinence her manner proved. She became at once open, candid, a delightful companion.

Meantime the Squire had not left Pitt Hall. When he met Betty, he said, with some confusion, that the ”Madam” (as he called Mrs. Samphire) had opposed so long a journey; one, moreover, which was like to prove a fool’s errand. He excused himself by complaining querulously of an estate which exacted constant supervision. His face was even more florid than usual, and his manner less complacent. When Betty mentioned this to Archie (who rode over from Westchester on a well-bred cob), he expressed a fear that his father was losing money.

”He spoke of going North,” Betty said, after a pause. ”If Mark is really ill, surely he ought to be nursed by—by his nearest and dearest?”

Archie betrayed astonishment.

”Ill? Really ill? I’ve heard nothing of serious illness, not a word. How do you know, Betty?”

”I have guessed,” she answered vehemently. ”He has slipped away to—to *die*, perhaps!”

Archie showed a most lively concern.

”No, no, you exaggerate. Look here, Betty, if someone ought to go North, I’ll go.”

”Oh, Archie—if you would.”

”Dear old Mark! Of course I’ll go. It happens that I can get a week’s leave. I’ll bring him home with me.”

He spoke in a warm, sympathetic tone, kindling Betty’s gratitude and affection. Never had she liked Mark’s brother so well.

”You can spare the time, Archie?”

”Yes, yes; I’m so glad you spoke to me. By the way, I’ve a piece of news for you—great news, too. I am commanded to preach at Windsor.”

”Oh, Archie, I *am* pleased to hear that. It will mean so much—won’t it.”

”Yes.”

She asked questions: Was the date set? Had he a theme? and so forth. ”You know,” she continued gravely, ”I shall never forget your Westchester sermon. Many sermons touch one, but that gripped. Often, I’ve not been quite fair to you, and now I’m horribly ashamed of myself. You forgive me?”

”My dear Betty! I say—was there so great a difference between that sermon and others I have preached?”

”Why, Archie, how modest you are! Don’t you know that you climbed to the heights that Whit-Sunday? Before, you seemed to be rambling about on the comfortable plains. Oh, I know we can’t scale mountains every day. Lord Randolph said as much——” She paused.

”What did Lord Randolph say?”

”He did not intend that it should reach your ears.”

”Betty—you will do me a favour by repeating what he said as he said it. I am not thin-skinned.”

”Well, he said that beer was good liquor, and that spirits should be used sparingly. You couldn’t preach such a sermon as that every Sunday.”

”Not I,” said Archie.

”The great thing is that you can stir up hearts when the occasion comes. I feel sure you will surpass yourself at Windsor.”

”I wish *I* felt sure, Betty. Well—I’ll do my best to persuade Mark to return with me, but he’s obstinate as a mule where his health is concerned. Shall I give him any message from you?”

”You can give him—my love.”

She spoke with assumed lightness of tone. Archie found a phrase.

"A man would travel farther than Sutherland to receive that." Then he took his leave, gravely smiling.

"He's a good sort," said Betty.

None the less she told herself that her intuitions in regard to men were fluid. Again and again she tried to grasp them, to mould them into permanent form, into definiteness; always they flowed away—peaceably sometimes, with a sweet melodic cadence, as of a Scotch burn, but more often roaring, like the same burn in spate; in either case leaving but a small silt behind.

The two days following Archie's departure she spent alone in the woods (for Mrs. Corrance seldom left her pretty garden), seeking from Nature an answer to the problem in her heart. The great oaks and beeches preserved an inviolate silence in those languorous July days, but the pines seemed to have a message for an attentive ear. Their sighs were, perhaps, the warning voices of the innumerable dead, hushed and (to most mortals) inarticulate. Here and there amidst this rich pastoral country Betty found sterile acres where even the hardy fir failed to find sustenance. These patches in the landscape had a weird fascination. Betty perceived beauty, dignity, in their subtle, faded tints, their delicate greys and shadowy browns. Once upon a time, doubtless, these barren spots had bloomed, too luxuriantly, perhaps; in due time they would bloom again in splendid resurrection. In the centre of one of the stony places a young birch tree of great beauty stretched slender limbs toward the green paradise which encompassed it, inclining slightly to the south.

"I am like that birch," said Betty.

CHAPTER XIX

A SANATORIUM IN SUTHERLAND

Archibald Samphire took with him to Scotland a suit-case and a small handbag. After leaving Perth, where he made an early breakfast, he opened the bag and pulled out a roll of foolscap covered with neat, scholarly handwriting. The reading of this MS. seemed to give him pleasure; but presently his fine brow puckered into wrinkles, and an excellent cigar was allowed to go out prematurely.

"It's not as good as I thought," he murmured; and he was not speaking of his cigar.

Presently he lit another cigar and reread the MS.—the sermon prepared for Royalty. When he wrote it, he told himself it eclipsed the one preached on Whit-Sunday at Westchester. Afterwards, rereading it in cold blood, he had come to the conclusion that it did not quite "grip," as Betty put it, although sound to the core doctrinally, and discreet; better suited, perhaps, for august ears than the other. Now, in this clear, cool northern air, judgment was of a less sanguine complexion. The theme warmed into life in the Close at Westchester lacked vitality in the Highlands. Mountain and moor made it seem anæmic. Archibald looked out of the window, which was open, and inhaled the fresh, pungent air. Not a house was to be seen, not even a shepherd's hut; the moors spread a purple carpet on which no human creature walked; the mountains, vast, rugged, solitary, encompassed the moors. Yet in the heart of this lonely wilderness men had swarmed together in conflict. These mountains had not barred the progress of an army. Guns, horses, transport waggons had defiled through the passes and across the treacherous peat bogs. That clear burn yonder had run red with blood. Here was fought the battle of Killiecrankie! Archie thought of these things as he sat with the sheets of his sermon in his hand. He bundled the MS. back into his bag, and closed it with a snap, divining his inability to deal adequately with what was primal!

He had wired to Mark that he was coming North; accordingly, at Lairg he found a "machine" awaiting him, a ramshackle cart drawn by a sturdy pony, whose attempts to leave the rough roads and plunge on to the moor indicated that he was more at ease beneath a deer packsaddle than between a pair of shafts. The driver eyed somewhat derisively Archie's clerical garments. "Ye're no a meenister?" he asked; and receiving a reply in the affirmative, added with emphasis, "Ye're verra young for that." A minute later he asked if his passenger were college-bred.

"I took my degree at Cambridge," said Archie.

"Indeed. A'm interested in the Punic Wars. Yon Scipio Africanus was a gran' man. I'd be obliged if ye'd tell me all ye ken aboot him."

Archie changed from pink to the colour of Turkey twill. What he knew about Scipio Africanus could have been put into a grain of millet seed. In some confusion—not wasted upon the critical Scot—he explained that the Punic Wars were beyond his horizon. The driver nodded compassionately, expressing no surprise at the Sassenach's ignorance. He was thin and angular; his grey eyes had curious flecks of brown in them; his face and hands were very red and hairy, and beneath the red hair Archie detected a certain amount of dirt. This restored the minor canon's sense of superiority. The Scot, however, wore stout homespun and superb stockings.

"You wear good clothes," said Archie.

"D'ye think they're too guid?"

”Certainly not,” said Archie hastily. ”Your Highland sheep look in fine condition.”

Once more the driver’s queer eyes met his. The brown flecks danced in the grey.

”They’re no mine, and they cam frae Teviotdale—they white-faced sheep.” The contempt in the man’s voice was unmistakable.

Archie wondered if the man also came from the border; he did not look like a Highlander; Highlanders always said ”whateffer.” He wished to ask questions about Crask, Ross’s lodge, but the brown flecks in the small, closely-set eyes were oddly disconcerting, so he stared at the face of the landscape instead of that of the man. They were driving over a bleak moor which stretched, far as the eye could reach, to some delicately blue hills fringing the western skies. The scene was panoramic and indescribably desolate. Along the road black posts, set at intervals, served as guides to such travellers—shepherds for the most part—who were obliged to cross the moors in winter-time, when snow covered all things. Archie thought of November and shivered. Presently they passed a small slate-tiled cottage built of rough grey stone and surrounded by a grey stone wall. Peats were piled close to a vast midden, on which some hens were scratching; beyond the peat stack stood the byre; garden, ornamental or useful, there was none. As the pony came to a sudden halt, three rough collies rushed out, barking furiously. The driver spoke to them and got down; he strode into the house, remained there ten minutes, and came out wiping his hairy chin. Archie smelled whisky. The driver picked up the reins, the collies barked, the pony shambled forward. Evidently the whisky had had an effect, for the Scot became communicative.

”He’s a verra mean man, yon,” he said, jerking his head in the direction of the house. ”We were tasting the noo, and I said, as he was filling the glass—’Stop!’ And wad ye believe it, the brute stoppit?”

Mark would have laughed. Archibald remained calm.

”There’s too much whisky drunk in Scotland,” he said.

”There’s’ mair drunk oot of it,” retorted the driver.

Archie refused to enter into argument, and the driver filled a black cutty with evil-smelling tobacco. After the moor was crossed, the character of the scenery changed. The road wound its way beside a charming burn to which heather-covered hills sloped steeply. Farther on, a loch reflected the saffron splendours of the sky. A splendid mountain—Ben Caryll—towered to the right.

”Yon’s the hoose,” said the driver.

The house crowned a small spur of Ben Caryll. At one side stood a small wooden chapel embellished by a diminutive bell-tower, in which hung a single bell of great sweetness of tone. A big lawn lay on the other side of the house, and Archie noted with surprise that tennis-courts were marked out. He noted

also, with equal surprise, the profusion of flowers and flowering shrubs and the care which allotted to each its particular place in the general plan of the garden. The house looked grey and grim, like all houses in this part of Scotland, and the windows had been enlarged, giving the building somewhat the appearance of a small factory. Behind the tennis-courts stood a row of rough sheds covered with creepers and facing the south. In the sheds he caught a glimpse of tables, chairs, sofas, and other simple furnishings.

Archie rang the bell, which jangled discordantly. The door was opened by Mark, who held out both hands, smiling. "It's awfully good of you, old fellow," he said. "I don't know how to thank you. You're just in time for supper. Here's the Bishop. He's up for a day or two."

David Ross nodded cordially and gripped Archie's hand. Two men came forward and were introduced. One shouldered the big suit-case and went upstairs with it, ignoring protests. Archie followed, carrying his small black bag and feeling that he had come on a fool's errand so far as Mark was concerned. Dying? Why, he looked stronger than he had looked for months. As soon as the brothers were alone Archie said as much.

"I suppose it's the air," Mark explained. "I'm out-of-doors night and day. My trouble is scotched."

"I can't understand how you can joke about it," said Archie.

"A vile pun, but irresistible. I say, wash that frown off your face and come down. We'll have a pipe and a good jaw afterwards. If you think, by the way, that I do look better, you might say so to David Ross. He's been awfully kind."

"Why didn't you go home?"

"I c-c-couldn't," said Mark shortly.

In the refectory, a long, low annexe to the house, the Bishop's guests sat at meat. Some of them were ruddy and robust; others looked thin and white, but not one, so Archie remarked, wore the sable of discontent. The eyes that met his were candid and clear—the eyes of men satisfied with their lot in life. At the foot of the table sat a little fellow with a big head, which waggled comically. Archie wondered where he had seen him before; then he remembered. The little man looked like Mr. Pickwick, although he lacked that illustrious character's deportment and dignity.

"Who is that?" he whispered to Mark, who sat beside him.

"That's Stride, our resident doctor. He's mad keen about the open-air cure. He got his ideas from Father Kneippe."

In those days neither Father Kneippe nor his ideas were famous. The open-air treatment for disease was practically unknown. Mark explained Stride's methods: his theories on diet and physical culture, facts now familiar to everybody.

”Stride lives here all the year round, you know. David Ross comes and goes at long intervals.”

”It must be desolate in winter.” Archie gave his impressions, including a description of the house with the huge midden. ”It was larger than the cottage,” he said in great disgust, ”and the drunken savage who drove me wanted to learn what I knew about Scipio Africanus and the Punic wars. Punic wars indeed!”

”I like the country and the people,” said Mark, ”but you have to climb to get at either.”

After supper the guests marched outside and settled themselves in the sheds, which were lit with lamps. Some read, some played chess, some listened to Stride, who talked unceasingly. The Bishop led Archie aside and asked him if he would like to smoke a pipe on the lawn.

”I'll smoke a cigar,” said Archie. ”Can I offer you one?”

”I prefer a pipe,” said the Bishop.

They strolled together on to the lawn. Although it was nearly ten, twilight still lingered about the landscape, as if loath to leave a scene so fair in darkness. Archie listened attentively to what his companion was saying.

”Your brother has neglected his body.” (Ross had been warned by Mark to say no more than this.) ”In such cases more or less of a breakdown is inevitable. I am delighted that you see a change for the better. Six months up here, under Stride, may set him up.”

”I hoped to take him back with me. I came up for that purpose.”

”Your brother can return with you, if he wishes, but would it be wise?”

”Perhaps not, perhaps not,” said Archie. ”We did not know that you were prepared to offer so generous a hospitality.”

”He will be a paying guest in more senses than one. I dare say you would like to talk to him. Good night! I have an immense pile of letters to answer. I hope you will stay with us as long as you please.”

He grasped Archie's hand, and strode off. Archie watched him for a moment, enviously. Ross gave the impression of power in action. It was certain that his amazing stride would take him far on any road—and always *upward and onward*: the motto adopted by his followers.

When he found himself alone with Mark, in the bedroom assigned to him, Archie said: ”Ross seems to think that you are doing better here than you would, for instance, in Slowshire.”

”Why, of course. I'm mending rapidly. One cannot do anything rapidly in Slowshire. It's not even a place to die in. One would dawdle over it.”

”You will speak with such levity——”

”I've not your gravity, my dear old fellow. Now then, tell me about yourself. What are you doing?”

"I've been commanded to preach at Windsor."

Mark was so eager and warm in his congratulations that Archie found it easy to go on.

"I've brought my MS. with me. I want you to skim through it."

"I must read it at once. This is wildly exciting."

Archie paced up and down, while Mark sat on the bed reading the sermon. Judging from his face, the fare was proving unpalatable. Archie saw that he was frowning and fidgeting with his fingers, as he used to do at Harrow, when he was looking over his major's verses. This familiar expression made the big fellow feel ludicrously like a boy. He half shut his eyes and waited for the inevitable: "I say, you know, this is awful bosh," of the Fifth Form days. Mark read the MS. through, and then glanced again at certain passages, before he said a word.

"Well," said Archie nervously, "will it do?"

Mark slid off the bed, put his hands in his pockets, and stared at his brother.

"That depends. It will do to light some fires with; but it won't set the Thames, near Windsor, ablaze."

"Call it 'bosh' and have done with it."

"It's not bosh. You've taken one of the Beatitudes."

"The Dean suggested that. He said it would please. Of course he knows."

"The text is the most inspiring in the New Testament, but you've treated it conventionally. Now look here——" He paused to collect his ideas. Archie saw that his eyes were shining with that suffused light which betokened in him mental or spiritual excitement. He began to pace up and down the narrow room; then he burst out: "You lay stress on the reward hereafter; a hereafter which the finite mind is unable to grasp. *The pure in heart shall see God in His Heaven.* Don't you know that the pure in heart see God here? That He is revealed, and only to the pure, in everything that lies around us. Ah, that is a theme, a celestial theme: the revelation of the Creator in the things created. And impurity blinds us. We look up to God, if we do look up, through a fog. You must take that line, Archie. Burn this—and begin again. And be sure that you define purity of heart aright. Don't confound it with purity of body. You are eloquent on the purity of a child. Why, man, the purity which knows not impurity is emasculate compared with the purity which knows impurity, which has fought with impurity, and yet, in the end, after conflicts innumerable, vanquishes impurity! I tell you that what men and women want to-day is substance. An ideal Heaven, an ideal earth, appeal to us, yes, but they charm as a mirage charms; they melt and fade as the mirage does. What you have written here," he tapped the foolscap impatiently, "might feed saints, but flesh-and-blood sinners would go empty away. By Heaven! if I had your voice, I would make the sinners hear."

"You must help me," said Archie in a low, hesitating voice.

”Why not?” said Mark excitedly. ”Give me the night to think. To-morrow we’ll put our heads together and the sparks shall fly. I haven’t used my brains for a month. This will do me good.”

”Will it?” said Archie doubtfully. Already Mark’s face was drawn and haggard; he looked ten years older than his brother.

”What is life,” said Mark contemptuously, ”if the salt of helping a pal be taken from it? I’m not useless yet. Good night. I sleep in a shed, you know. And I can see the stars whenever I open my eyes.”

”It’s so cloudy here,” said Archibald.

”I can see through most clouds, but s-s-some——”

Mark paused abruptly, the light faded in his eyes, as he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XX

BETTY SEES A SPRIG OF RUE

Archibald returned to Westchester some three days later. In the small black bag was another MS. quite as bulky as the first, and covered with Mark’s handwriting. Blots and smudges deformed it; the edges were dog-eared, whole sentences were excised, red pencil marks flamed amidst the black. Yet Archibald read it through again and again, smiling, and nodding his handsome head. He was not alone in his first-class carriage, and his companion, a shrewd Scotch lawyer, guessed why the minister kept moving his lips as he read his MS. In fancy he was declaiming it.

The day after his arrival at the lodge the elder brother had said to Mark: ”By the way, Betty Kirtling sent her love to you. Have you any message for her?”

”None,” said he slowly. ”I hope she is well.”

Archie, not detecting the anxiety in his tone, thought Betty was looking very well. Then he mentioned Jim.

”He comes from Friday to Monday, every week. He wants Betty, but I don’t fancy he’ll get her.”

”Have you any reason for saying that?” Mark asked, wondering whether Archie was clearer-sighted than he had supposed.

”Jim is a materialist.”

”Oh, come now!”

”A money-grubber and an agnostic.”

”One of the best of fellows. Ross never appeals to him in vain.”

”As if any rich man couldn’t write a cheque. Betty ought to marry somebody very different.”

”Don’t abuse him to Betty.”

”Betty is rather—undisciplined.”

”You can say that of all of us. I hope to God she won’t marry a schoolmaster.” He glanced at his brother with an eye that flamed. He had been smitten by the fear that Betty might marry Archie.

”What strong expressions you use, Mark. It doesn’t sound quite—how shall I put it?—well, seemly, for a man who holds Orders. I see no chance of Betty marrying a schoolmaster. I have great hopes that she will choose wisely. She said ’No’ to Harry Kirtling, and she will say ’No’ to Jim Corrance.”

”And she said ’No’ to you,” Mark reflected.

Within the week Archibald rode over to King’s Charteris, where he found Betty in Mrs. Corrance’s garden gathering roses. He had wired that he was returning without Mark. She took the telegram to her room, where pride dried her eyes and hardened her heart. That night Jim told himself he had a chance. She had never been so kind to him, so understanding, so alluring. But on the brink of declaration he hesitated, fearing to leap. Afterwards he wondered what might have happened if he had—leaped boldly instead of looking and longing.

Betty received Archie with the question, ”Is Mark really ill?”

Archie hesitated.

”He looks stronger,” he said slowly. ”And he is in his usual spirits: the life and soul of the place. There can’t be anything really wrong. In fact he joked about his health. He doesn’t take anything very seriously, you know. David Ross told me that he had overworked himself—more or less.”

”You gave him my love?” Betty murmured lightly. She had the faintest tinge of colour in her cheeks, but her voice was almost cold.

”Yes.”

”And I hope he sent a nice message to me in return?”

”No. He asked if you were well. I said—yes. You do look uncommonly well, Betty.”

She wore white, which set off the delicate tints and admirable texture of her skin, but her hat was black, giving a necessary note of contrast. At her throat, holding together a *jabot* of creamy laces, sparkled an old-fashioned enamel ornament set with tiny brilliants. Standing on the sloping lawn, her figure defined against a towering yew fence, and holding in her hand the roses she had just gath-

ered, the girl made a picture which lured Archie's thoughts even from Windsor.

"I suppose a country life agrees with me."

"You are wonderful."

She moved to a bench, the young man following her with eager feet and eyes. He could not see that her heart was beating, nor did he notice that the brilliancy of her eyes was due to an abnormal enlargement of the pupil. She sat down, smiling derisively. Then she bade him tell her about the sanatorium. When he had finished, she said quietly, "You were very, very kind to take that long journey."

"It's easy to be kind to people like you—and Mark."

His delightful voice softened, because when he mentioned his brother's name the memory of what that brother had done on his behalf filled him with gratitude.

"I hear you are kind to everybody. All Slowshire sings your praises."

Archibald shook his head, wondering whether Betty would mention the sermon. He was burning with impatience to try on, so to speak, some of its phrases, to watch the effect of them on a woman who had listened to the Gamaliels of the day. Betty possessed sincerity, imagination, sympathy. These would flow freely at the touch of a friend's hand.

"If it would not bore you," he said, "I should like to talk over the Windsor sermon. You can help me——"

"I? Help—you?"

"You can, indeed"; his voice grew eager. "Whatever I say will be the fresher and purer if it passes through your mind before it is given to the world."

"My mind *is* a sort of filter." She laughed. None the less she was pleased and flattered. Archibald began to speak in a soft monotone. Betty half closed her eyes and the lines of her figure slightly relaxed beneath the caressing inflections of the speaker's voice. Whenever Archie sang she was affected in the same way. A languor overcame her. For the moment she was not attempting to grasp the meaning of his words, which, even as inarticulate sounds, possessed value and significance. But, soon, she opened her eyes wide and sat up. By this time Archie was at the core of his theme, and his treatment of it was so masterly that Betty found herself thrilling with surprise and delight. A few minutes before life had seemed empty. Now it was full again, brimming over, bubbling, with possibilities swelling from shadow into substance. Archie, be it remembered, was not preaching the sermon. He was rather submitting the material, the tissues, the threads, the patterns, out of which a fine piece of work had been already fashioned. Now and again Betty was invited to choose, to select, out of these wares some one which pleased her fancy. She realised that Archie had more of Mark in him than she had deemed possible. Once or twice she seemed to hear Mark's eager tones.

"You say that like Mark."

"Has Mark talked to you on this theme?"

"Oh, no," Betty replied, "but he pours out his ideas, as you do."

"Mark and I have talked about this. He helped me. He always does."

Archie spoke hesitatingly, on the edge of full confession. He had a genuine desire to tell Betty the truth. The words formed on his lips.

"Yes, yes," said Betty absently. "Mark has helped me too, many a time; but he's in Sutherland." Her voice became cold as she recalled his letter. "I feel as if he were at the North Pole! Well, Archie, I've enjoyed our talk immensely."

"And when may I come to talk to you again?"

"You are not going—now?"

The "now" brought a sparkle to his eyes.

"I must. I'm one of the busiest men in Westchester."

"I shall run down to Windsor to hear your sermon," she said.

"Our sermon, Betty."

"That's rubbish. You must never pay me compliments, Archie. I couldn't stand them from you——" she broke off, irrelevantly: "How did you attain to your pinnacle? I suppose you've been climbing ever since we were children. It's quite wonderful. Don't come Friday or Saturday. Jim will be here. Poor, rich Jim! What do you think of Jim?"

Archie remembered, in the nick of time, what Mark had said about not abusing Jim.

"I think what you think," he said slowly. "Poor, rich Jim!"

After he had gone, Betty picked no more roses, but sat down on the bench, feeling rather forlorn. Archibald had taken something away with him. What it was she could not define precisely. For instance—was it Jim's character? He had said nothing. Nothing—except her own words: "Poor, rich Jim." Jim had been his friend, although the men had now little in common. Of course, he would not speak unkindly of an old schoolfellow. Yet as a preacher of Christ's gospel, he must in his heart rank Jim amongst Christ's enemies. Jim was not with Christ. He did not believe in Christ. The conclusion was obvious: he must be counted as an enemy. An enemy? Poor Jim!

She was still thinking of Jim, when his mother came towards her. She seemed to ascend the grass slope with difficulty; so Betty ran forward to offer an arm, which was accepted. As they moved slowly on, Betty glanced at the quiet face so near her own. Again, curiosity devoured her. She observed a faded look which she tried to interpret. Did it spell disappointment? Were the last draughts of life proving bitter? Perhaps she felt that her work was done, that her little world would wag on without her. They sat down, and Mrs. Corrance produced her needle, her silks, and a piece of embroidery from the old-fashioned velvet

bag, which she always carried on her arm. Betty, who never sewed, wondered if the day would ever dawn when she would find solace in such trivial occupations. Then Mrs. Corrance asked for news of Mark. After that was told, silence fell on both: the silence which precedes the breaking of barriers. Then Betty said softly: "Are you glad that you have lived—or sorry?"

The frail hands, poised above the delicate embroidery, sank upon it, and remained still, while faint lines of interrogation puckered the placid forehead. Betty continued: "I ought not to ask such questions. I rush in like a fool. But then I am a fool, although I long to be wise. There is so much a girl like me wants to know, but if you tell me to hold my tongue I shall not be surprised or offended."

"I'm glad that I have lived, Betty."

"That is because you have loved. Your love for Jim has filled your life, ever since I have known you. If—if—oh, I am ashamed to put it so brutally—but if you lost Jim, or if Jim had never been born—what then?"

"My dear, you press me too hard. I can hardly conceive of life without Jim," she smiled. "He came when all was dark, and there has been light for me—ever since."

"When all was dark——" repeated Betty. She knew that Jim's father had died when Jim was a small boy.

"Yes. My married life was not happy. Perhaps I expected too much, as is the way with women; perhaps it was not meant that I should be happy."

"Not *meant*?" Betty spoke with impatience. "Surely the design, the intention, includes happiness, only we mar it."

"All young people think that," said Mrs. Corrance, "but as we grow older we see so little real happiness that we must believe, if we believe in the mercy of God, that, save for the few, happiness on earth is not to be enjoyed but earned rather, so that it may be enjoyed, without alloy, hereafter. And I believe that to everyone a glimpse of happiness is vouchsafed. Were it not for that, how many would struggle on?"

Betty asked no more questions. The youth in her rebelled against this placid acceptance of suffering and strife. She told herself that she had enormous capacity for enjoyment. Politics, literature, history, sport: all were fish to her net. But religion, and in particular that concrete presentation of it by the Church of England, had, so far, left her cold. She seemed to have touched but its phylacteries, out of which came no virtue. She had met many clever men who confessed themselves agnostic. Her kind friend, Lady Randolph, never spoke of religion, either in its wide or narrow sense. Certainly she did her duty without aid or formulæ. In fact, when Betty came to think of it, some freethinkers of her acquaintance lived more Christian lives than many Churchpeople who took the Sacrament ev-

ery Sunday. This was puzzling. On the other hand, the life she had led since the Admiral's death, the life of Mayfair, of big country houses, of race-meetings, of perpetual pleasure-seekings, had begun to pall. The grandmothers—some of them—who gambled, and made love, and over-ate themselves, revolted her. That they were at heart discontented and unhappy she could not doubt. Finally, she had just come to the trite conclusion that, in or out of the fashionable world, the people least to be pitied were those who had some definite object in view. Politics, for instance, had probably saved Lord Randolph from the hereditary curse of his family; fox-hunting made Harry Kirtling ride straight and walk straight; Jim Corrance admitted that money-grubbing kept him out of mischief. These pursuits, however, led to negative results: being preventive of evil, not productive of good, except indirectly. Mark Samphire not only avoided evil, but did good, as dozens were eager to testify, including herself. When with Mark she had always been conscious of his power to bring out the good in her. And this afternoon, listening to Archie, she had felt the same thrill, the same irresistible yearning to ascend, to scale the heights. None the less, she was whimsically aware, being a creature of sense as well as sensibility, that Mark cast a glamour. She loved him, and, loving him, loved what he loved, tried to see Heaven's wares with his eyes, and succeeded, so long as the magician remained at her side. When he was at work in Whitechapel and she was shopping in Bond Street, Heaven, somehow, seemed distant. At such times she looked at a set of sables or a diamond ornament with a pleasure which proved that the clay within her was very far from being purged.

Upon the following Saturday, when Jim asked her to become his wife, to share the fortune which would be no fortune without her, she said No, as kindly as words and looks could say it. Her distress at the pain she inflicted touched him profoundly.

"I shall remain your pal, Betty," Jim declared. "The other thing was always a forlorn hope. Is it any use saying that I have known for years that I wasn't first, and that I was sanguine enough to believe that if the first failed, I might be second? Isn't half a loaf better than no bread, dear?"

She let him take her hand, but she turned aside eyes full of tears.

"We'll go on as before. The mater needn't know—eh? It has been a great thing for her having you here."

"And a great thing for me," said Betty unsteadily. "I wish I could marry you, dear old Jim, but I can't—I can't."

She broke down, sobbing bitterly. Jim patted her hand, wondering what he could say to comfort her, but the words which came into his head seemed inadequate. If he had taken her face between his strong hands, kissed away her tears, and sworn passionately that he would love and cherish her so long as she

lived, she might have changed a mind which was less strong than her body. While she sat weeping beside him, she was thinking not so much that she had lost Mark, but that she had lost love. The woman within her groaned, the flesh and blood protested. She saw herself as in a vision, treading the dreary years alone, with no strong arm to protect and defend, with no tiny hands to cling to and caress her. And at the end of the pilgrimage stood old age, grim and grey, carrying a sprig of rue in palsied shrivelled hands!

CHAPTER XXI
RECUPERATION

Mark went North with David Ross convinced that his months, if not his days, were numbered; but as time passed, this conviction passed with it, and hope once more fluttered into his heart. Stride took extraordinary interest in his case.

"You must become an animal and remain an animal till I give you leave to assume again the man," he told Mark after Archibald had left Crask. "I don't know what you and your brother have been up to, but you've had a relapse. You must go on all-fours till I tell you to walk upright."

Mark promised, but he added: "I feel an animal—an ass!"

Stride growled out something about dead lions, and set Mark to work in the garden, bare-legged and bare-headed. The work was light, but it strained every muscle in Mark's body. Then he was made to lie down in one of the sheds. After such rest came refreshment—easily digested, nourishing food, taken in small quantities, but often. During this month Mark reckoned that he was sleeping fourteen hours out of the twenty-four. At the end of each week Stride weighed him and applied a number of tests to determine what strength he had gained. There was a sort of rivalry between the patients. Dick who had gained two pounds crowed over Tom who had gained one. Into this competition Mark entered with boyish keenness. Stride said he was the star pupil of the class.

By the beginning of October, a radical improvement had taken place. The cold weather set in sharply, but Mark, always susceptible to atmospheric change, braved the frosty nights with impunity, sleeping in the sheds with the winds howling about him. He had the confidence in Stride that a well-trained dog has in his master. Some of Stride's "animals"—as he called them—proved at first unmanageable. Coming, as most of them did, from the strenuous life of crowded

cities, accustomed to and yearning for the stimulus of constant mental action, such stagnation as Stride enforced seemed insupportable. These kittle cattle were yoked for a season with Mark.

Meantime he had received many letters from his friends, but none from Betty, who had returned to Lady Randolph. Jim wrote that he had been rejected, but made no mention of Archibald, who was often seen crossing the downs between Westchester and Birr Wood. As a matter of fact, Jim was not aware of these rides. He remained in London making money. From Pynsent Mark learned of the enthusiasm aroused by Archibald's Windsor sermon.

"Reading in the paper" (he wrote) "that your brother was preaching in St. George's Chapel, I went down to Windsor yesterday to hear him. He is quite amazing. What he said and the way he said it took us by storm. The Whitsuntide sermon gave only a taste of his quality. Out of the pulpit he has always struck me as being the typical English parson of means and position; in it he is—*apostolic*! I can find no other adjective to describe his persuasiveness, sincerity, and power. Lord Randolph tells me that it made a profound impression in the highest quarter. I saw Betty Kirtling and Lady Randolph in the knights' stalls...."

Mark thrust the letter into his pocket with an exclamation which made the man working next to him raise his brows.

"Anything wrong, Samphire? No bad news, I hope?"

Mark blurted out the truth. His companion, broken down by hard work in Manchester, had sympathetic eyes and lips which dropped compassion upon all infirmities save his own.

"I've had good news, Maitland: my brother has preached a great sermon at Windsor, and—and there is something wrong with me. I have the damnable wish that he'd failed—as I failed." Then he laughed harshly, bending down to pick up his spade.

That afternoon he climbed the mountain, which sloped steeply to the loch. The air, he felt, on the top of Ben Caryll would purge and purify; the panoramic view would enlarge the circle of his sympathies. And so it proved, although a materialist might assign another cause. When Mark reached the highest peak he became aware that he had accomplished a feat of physical endurance beyond such powers as he possessed two months before. He was not aware of undue fatigue; on the contrary, a strange exhilaration permeated mind and body. He could have danced, but he sat down, soberly enough, and reread Pynsent's letter. When he had done this, he tried to transport himself to Windsor. He wanted to sit with Betty in the knights' stalls, beneath the gorgeous silken banners, and

the emblazoned shields of the princes of the world, under the eye and ægis of a living sovereign. But fancy left him—in Sutherland. He gazed upon moor and mountain whitened here and there by snow. He looked into the pale, luminous skies above, into the frosty opalescent mists to the westward, through which the sun glowed like a red-hot ball, and wherever he looked Betty was not. For the moment he could not recall her face. It seemed as if he were seeking a stranger with a written description of her in his hand.

Sitting there, some voice whispered to him that Betty wanted him, that he must descend the mountain and go to her. Then he told himself that he was mad. If he obeyed this beguiling voice in his ears, if he went south—what then? The hope in his eye and heart would kindle like hope in her, and such hope was a will-o'-the-wisp flickering above—a grave!

When he came down from the mountain, he found Stride busy in his laboratory. Stride possessed a magnificent Zeiss microscope and all the accessories—incubating ovens, sterilising apparatus, stains, and reagents—for the highest bacteriological work. Of late, Mark had given the little man some help in staining and mounting preparations.

"We are out of one world," Stride had said, "but I will introduce you to another through an apochromatic lens. You will find yourself quite at home, my friend. Here, in this drop of water, you will note the same struggle for existence, the same old game as it is played in Whitechapel or Whitehall."

When Mark began to understand something of the technique of the microscope, when Stride had shown him its uses, for instance, in the analysis of diseased tissue or blood, and revealed its magical powers of diagnosis, Mark asked a question: "How can any doctor work without one?" Stride laughed at such innocence.

"It takes up too much time. No hard-working practitioner ignores the value of it, but he cannot use it. When necessary, he sends preparations to some specialist. A microscope exacts more attention than a wife. That is why I"—he slapped his chest and winked furiously—"have remained single."

This devotion to his work strengthened the chain which linked patient to doctor. Stride—Mark felt assured—might have secured fame and fortune in London. Yet he chose to remain unknown and poor in Sutherland.

Mark told him that he had climbed Ben Caryll, and felt none the worse for it. Stride shook his big head.

"You oughtn't to attempt such walks—yet."

"Then the time is coming. I shall regain my health?"

He had never put the question so directly before. Stride eyed him attentively, hearing a new note in his voice.

"Per—haps."

"If I asked for leave of absence——"

"It would be refused—peremptorily," said Stride. "Why, man, you'd douse the glim which I've been coaxing into flame all these weeks. What magnet draws you from Crask? A woman?"

"Yes—a woman."

"Oh, these tempestuous petticoats! Now, Samphire, I'm not a fool, and I guessed, when you came here, that you left a girl behind you. You are not engaged to her?"

"No."

"Good! Now, listen to wisdom. If everything goes well with you—if fresh air and simple food and freedom from worry make you whole, you may marry some day—but you'll have to wait a long time, so as to make sure, and even then, after years of comparative health, you may break down again. Will this young lady wait for you—indefinitely?"

"I should never ask her to do that."

"Um! I daresay she's flirting with someone at this very minute. Eh? I beg pardon, Samphire. Your goddess, no doubt, is an exception; but few women, if they are women, can get along without a man. And now you must leave me. I'm on the edge of a small discovery. I've done some good work to-day."

"Your good work will tell, Stride."

"What d'ye mean? Recognition? If it comes, so much the better; if it doesn't, I've had 'the joy of the working'—eh?"

Next day, a letter from Archibald gave many details. He had enjoyed the honour of meeting his Sovereign, who said gracious things; he had dined with a Cabinet Minister; he had been interviewed at length by a reporter. The letter concluded as follows:—

"I cannot doubt that my sphere of influence and activity is about to be enlarged. If so, I shall count upon your help. I am deeply grateful for what you have done already. I recognise in you, my dear, dear brother, an insight into human life and character wider than my own. You have come into contact with what is primal and elemental: an experience lacking as yet to me. I have spoken of this to all our friends, acknowledging frankly my debt to you...."

Mark's smile, when he read these lines, was not easy to interpret, but the sense that, for a brief hour, he had grudged his own flesh and blood a triumph, made him reply cordially and affectionately. He ended his letter by assuring Archibald that such help as one brother could give another would always be at his disposal.

About this time, feeling stronger day by day, he began to wonder what

work he should do in the future. Stride was emphatic that life in the East End would mean a return of his malady. Not being able to preach, a country curacy was unavailable; and in any case Mark told himself that such work would be distasteful. Stride startled him by saying abruptly, "Why don't you write?"

"Eh?"

"It's in you, I'll swear. It would be only a crutch, at first, but you have private means. You can write out-of-doors. You will be your own master. You can take proper care of yourself...." Stride waxed eloquent, and Mark listened with a curious exaltation.

"By Jove!" he said, drawing a deep breath, "I believe I can write."

"Everybody writes nowadays," said Stride, "but I have the feeling that you can write what a lot of us will want to read. Think it over!"

Mark thought it over for a week. Ideas inundated his brain, clamouring for expression. He begged permission to try his hand at a short story: four thousand words. Stride gave a grudging consent.

"Mind you," said he, "you're not fit for any sustained mental exertion, but go ahead—full steam, if you like, and we'll see what will happen."

Mark wrote his story, and submitted both it and himself to the autocrat. This was a week later, and the scales proclaimed a loss of two pounds. Stride pursed up his lips and waggled his big head.

"Back you go to the garden to-morrow," he growled. "I'll read your stuff to-night, and tell you what I think of it. It's almost certain to be rubbish."

In the morning, however, he had nothing but praise for the author, whose mind was by no means as familiar to him as his body. He beamed and gesticulated as if he had discovered a new bacillus. The story was despatched to an editor, Arthur Conquest, whom Stride knew, and Mark was enjoined to think no more about it. Think about it he did, naturally. The possibility of doing good work in a new field filled him once more with the ardours of youth. He told Stride there was a certain inevitableness about his failures. What had gone before—all trials and disappointments—were part of a writer's equipment. He could not doubt that he had found at last a strong-box, so to speak, for such talents as he possessed. Action had been denied him, articulate speech was not his, the power of putting a noble conception on to canvas he lacked; but he could, he would, he should write according to the truth that was in him, so help him God!

Stride warned him that the odds were greatly against his manuscript being accepted. The editor, however, read the story himself, and promised to publish it. His letter contained a message to Mark.

"Will you tell Mr. Samphire" (wrote Conquest) "that I am going to red-pencil his story, which I take

to be a first attempt. He must serve his apprenticeship, which in his case needn't be a long one. I can see that he sets for himself a high standard. If he means business I should advise him to write a novel and burn it. When he comes to town, I hope to make his acquaintance."

"Conquest is cold-blooded," said Stride, "but he has a prescient eye. All the same, if you have business dealings with him—look out! And now—go back to your cabbages."

Mark told Maitland what had passed. Maitland entered with sympathy into his plans, confessing that he had tried writing as a trade.

"Grub Street is a long lane with no turning in it for nine-tenths of the foot passengers. I hope you'll gallop down it, Samphire, not crawl as I did."

Maitland looked, so Mark reflected, as if he had gone afoot down many paths. Failure was branded upon his pale, too narrow face, his stooping shoulders, his large, clumsy hands: all thumbs, and crudely fashioned at that! But Ross, who was no longer at Crask, had told Mark that Maitland filled a very large place in his huge Manchester parish.

"What made you go into the Church?" Mark asked abruptly.

"I had to earn my bread and—scrape; but afterwards——"

"Yes?"

Maitland's dull, sallow complexion seemed to be suffused with a glow. It struck Mark that between his face as he was accustomed to see it and as he saw it now lay the difference between a stage-scene lighted and unlighted.

"Afterwards," said Maitland, "I knew that the choice of my profession had been determined by a Power infinitely greater than my own will. I became a parson from ignoble motives. I was soured, bitter, sick in mind and body, unfit for the duties I undertook. And then suddenly—one hardly likes to talk about it—my eyes were opened. I came into contact with hundreds worse off than myself. Some of them bore their burdens with a patience, a serenity, an unselfishness that were a revelation—to me. And then I realised that no life is a failure which brightens however faintly the lives of others. Napoleon is the colossal failure of history, because he darkened a continent. I would sooner be a beggar sharing a crust with a child than such as he."

"If you were offered preferment——?"

"I hope to live and die in Manchester."

"You nearly did die. Suppose you were not strong enough to go back? You wince, Maitland. That would try your faith. You have been frank with me; I shall be frank with you. I have always wanted one thing, and because I wanted it so much, I tried to bargain with Heaven. I said, 'You shall do what you like with me, only give me, give me the woman I love!' Well, Heaven seemed to take

up the challenge. You know my story. I was defeated again and again. And I said to myself I'll grin and bear it, because she is mine. Ah, if you could see her, Maitland, as I see her, if you knew what I have f-f-felt, when I saw her image f-f-fa—fading——" He paused, overcome by his stammer, controlled it, and continued quietly, "I was told that I must die. Ross found me in despair. I—I do not know, but the river was close at hand, and—perhaps—at any rate he rescued me, brought me here, and now, now, I am beginning to live again. I see God in His Heaven. And I see my angel in mine."

He was so excited that Maitland entreated him to be calm, introducing, as an anticlimax, the cabbages to be cut and carried in.

Shortly after this Stride allowed him to begin his novel. After the first distress of beginning it became plain that this work agreed with him. Weight and appetite increased as the manuscript grew fat. He was out all weathers, and his face became tanned like that of a North Sea fisherman. Stride rubbed his hands chuckling, whenever he saw him.

During these months Mark told himself that it was impossible for Betty to write to him till he broke the silence which he had imposed. Meanwhile, he heard that Archibald had accepted a London living: St. Anne's in Sloane Street. Mrs. Samphire sent Mark a long cutting from the *Slowshire Chronicle*, a synopsis of his brother's labours in and about Westchester. As secretary, and member of many committees, as a lecturer on Temperance, as a pillar of the Charity Organisation Society, as the first tenor of the Westchester Choral Association, Archibald Samphire had honestly earned the gratitude of the community and the very handsome salver, which embalmed that gratitude in a Latin sentence composed by the Dean. Archibald had been asked to preach four Advent sermons in Westminster Cathedral. Mark suggested a theme, revised the sermons, interpolated a hundred passages, cut and slashed his brother's beautiful MSS., and when the sermons were preached and attracted the attention of London, wrote a letter of warm congratulation to his "dearest old fellow." He had taken greater pains with these sermons than with his own novel, because—as he put it to himself—he had grudged his brother a triumph which Betty Kirtling had witnessed.

One week after the New Year, he was writing the last lines of his book, when Stride came into the room and flung down a letter in Archibald's handwriting. Mark glanced at it, and at the pile of MS. beside it.

"Is the *magnum opus* done?" said Stride.

"Very nearly," Mark replied.

"Are you going to take Conquest's advice and—burn it?"

"I shall let Conquest see it first," said Mark. He rose from his chair, crossed the room to where Stride was warming his hands at the fire, and laid his hand upon his friend's shoulder. "It's not bad," he said slowly; "I know it's not bad; and

I owe it all to you, Stride."

"What is it about?" said Stride, repudiating the debt with a shake of his head. Mark had not shown him any portion of the MS., nor discussed the theme.

"It's the story of a faith that was lost and found," said Mark. "I can say to you that it is part of my own life, red-hot from my heart, the sort of story that is written once, you understand, and I have the feeling that it could have been written only here, in these solitudes."

"I hope it ends happily," said Stride.

"It ends happily," said Mark, staring at his MS.

Stride filled his pipe and then moved to the door.

"It's going to snow," he said. "We shall have a heavy fall, unless I'm mistaken. It was just such a night as this, last year, when we lost our shepherd on Ben Caryll."

He went out, whistling. The door slammed behind him, and the draught from it fluttered the pages of foolscap lying loose on the table. Mark stared at them, smiling, with such a look on his face as a mother bestows on her first-born, when she is alone with him. Then, still smiling, he picked up his brother's letter and broke the seal, the seal of many quarterings, which Archibald habitually used.

"My dear Mark" (he wrote): "I am the happiest as well as the luckiest of men. Betty Kirtling has promised to become my wife. We shall be married as soon as possible, before I settle down to my new work in London...."

The letter fell from Mark's hands. He bent down, trembling, picked it up, and reread its message. Then, crushing the letter into a ball, he flung it into the fire, and watched it crumble and dissolve into ashes. As the flame licked the white paper, the face that stared into the fire shrivelled into a caricature of what it had been a few moments before. The lips were drawn back from the teeth in a snarling grin; colour left the cheeks and flared in purple patches upon the brow. The slender limbs shook as with a palsy....

Suddenly, the silence was broken by a laugh: the derisive laugh of the man who knows that his heavens have fallen. The sound of his own laughter seemed to move Mark to action. He seized the manuscript, and thrust it into the flames. When it was destroyed, he laughed again, crossed to the door, opened it, and

passed out—still laughing—into the driving wind and rain.

CHAPTER XXII
ON BEN CARYLL

Mark stood still for a moment, as the wind whipped his face. Then he strode towards the burn which runs into the loch at the foot of Ben Caryll. He was meeting a north-easter, which drove the rain, now turning into sleet, with stinging violence against his face. When he reached the burn he saw that it was beginning to rise. It would be in spate in an hour or two if the storm continued. The big stepping-stones, shining through the mists, were almost covered by the peat-stained, swirling waters, as Mark sprang from one boulder to the other. Having reached the other side, he paused and looked at the burn. Above it widened into a broad, deep pool, with flecks and clots of white spume lying like cream upon its chocolate-coloured surface. Below, it narrowed, running foaming through steep rocky banks, and falling some twenty feet into a bigger pool. Standing where he stood the roar of the fall drowned all sounds. His blood was cooler now; he was able to think. He stared at the stepping-stones. Had his foot slipped, the raging torrent would have whirled him over the falls. If he returned an hour later the ford would be impassable. He would have to go round by the bridge some two miles higher up. With this thought lurking in but not occupying his mind he breasted the heather hill immediately to the right, fighting his way against the wind. He plunged on until he reached some peat hags, when he paused to recover breath. The blood was racing through his veins. Never had he felt so alive, so strong; and yet poison was consuming him. What poison? An answer came on the roaring blast. *Hate*! Hatred of his brother. He threw out his arms towards the darkening skies.

”Curse him!” he cried. ”Curse him! Curse him!”

Then he crossed the hags, and gained a small turf-covered plateau, whence Ben Caryll rose steeply and stonily. This part of the mountain was known as Eagle Rocks, because for many seasons a pair of golden eagles had nested on one of the crags. On a calm day it was no easy feat to scale these rocks. Tourists, for instance, always went round by a deer path, which the gillies used also. Mark laughed. He felt strong, a man: here was an opportunity to test his strength. He grasped a tuft of heather and swung himself to the top of the first rock, but

when he tried to stand upright the wind wrestled with him and prevailed. He was constrained to crouch and crawl, clinging to every stick and stone which hands or feet could find. But the spirit within would not allow him to turn back. Foot by foot he ascended the face of the precipice, knowing that if a stone turned, or a tuft gave way, he must fall on the sharp rocks below—knowing and not caring. When he reached the top he was perspiring, breathless, bleeding and spent. He lay still, letting the sleet lash his face. When he felt able to move he sat up and looked across the corrie which lay to the left of the Eagle Rocks. Beyond this stretched a gigantic spur of the mountain; and immediately below lay the strath, with the Crask burn curling down the middle of it. As he looked a veil of mist and scud swept over the mountain. When it seemed thickest, the wind took it and tore it asunder. Glimpses of objects familiar to him during the past five months succeeded each other in procession, filing by to the roar of the wind and the voices of the mountain. In like manner glimpses of his past life presented themselves for an instant, only to be wiped from memory and obliterated as swiftly. Out of the mirk soared the spire of Harrow Church. In the Yard below the boys were cheering a school-fellow, who ran bare-headed down the steps and into the street. It was Archibald, newly elected a member of the school eleven. He saw him again, as he stood in the pulpit in Westchester Cathedral. Again and again, in the arms of Betty!

Suddenly he became aware that the wind had moderated somewhat in violence and that snow was falling. He recalled what Stride had said, as he rose, stretched his stiffening limbs, and turned to the huge spur which led to the bridge across the Crask burn. The snow fell in larger flakes. The wind moaned like a woman who has no strength left to scream.

After stumbling on for a mile or so amongst the rough heather, Mark was obliged to sit down in the lee of a "knobbie." With the waning light of a Highland winter's afternoon, the air had turned cold; and it seemed to have thickened, so that Mark breathed as a man breathes in a close and stifling room. This rapid fall of temperature and wind produced weird effects. The voices of the mountain changed their note. Defiance died away in a diminuendo. Mountain rills, trickling from a thousand springs to join the burn below, purred beneath the touch of the snow. The roar of the falls came faintly to the ear. After strife and confusion, Nature was crooning a lullaby.

Exhausted by what mind and body had endured, Mark fell asleep. The snow fluttered down, thickly, silently, as the minutes passed. The cold grew more intense. Night came on. Mark stirred in his sleep; he uttered inarticulate words; he frowned; he smiled. And then, as if touched by some warning hand, he woke. He stared round him, seeking some familiar face. When the snow fell into his eyes he rubbed them, and stared harder than before, trying to pierce the

shadows. Then he cried in a troubled voice:

"Who touched me?"

No answer came out of the white silence.

"Who touched me?" he cried again.

His ears caught the purr of the rivulets and the muffled roar of the burn in spate. He knew where he was. And then, for a moment, he hesitated. A pleasant languor was stealing over him. Let him sink back upon his feathery bed—and sleep. No—no! He had waked to live.

The instinct of life began to throb when he realised the imminence of death. Fatigue left him as he strode forward, quickening his pace, where the ground permitted, to a run. It was difficult to see, but salvation lay down hill. He staggered on, peering to left and right, as the faint light that remained slowly failed. Before he reached the burn it had failed entirely. He was now in a sore predicament, for the ground no longer descended sharply, but sloped in undulations. He began to grope his way like a blind man, walking in circles. The roar of the falls far away to his right could no longer be heard.

He was lost!

He stood compassless in a desert. No friendly ray from a lantern could pierce this white horror. If his friends discovered his absence, which was unlikely till too late, what could they do? Search Sutherland in a snowstorm for one man?

Staggering on through drifts and hags, he realised that the time was fast approaching when his muscles would fail.

Did he pray for deliverance? No. If at that moment one thought dominated another, it was the conviction that God, if a God existed, had forsaken him. The struggle for life involved a paradox with which his brain could not grapple. Life had become sweet because it seemed inevitable that he must die.

Stumbling over a tuft of heather, a cock grouse rose, cackled, and whirled away. The vigour of the flight, the vitality of that defiant note, stimulated the jaded man. He chose at random a direction, and began to run, stopping now and again, straining his ears to catch the sound of the burn.

Presently he stopped altogether, sinking inert, hopeless, spent, upon the soft snow which received him wantonly, touching him with a caress, winding itself round him. He lay still, submitting to Nature, stronger than he, confessing himself vanquished, and asking that the end might be speedy. With death impending, he turned his thoughts towards the woman he loved—the woman about to marry his brother. He would die, as he wished to die, gazing into her face, feeling the cool touch of her fingers, hearing her voice with its tender inflections and modulations. And her image came obedient to his call. Her eyes, with their beguiling interrogation, showing the full orb of the irid between the thin black lines of the lashes, looked into his. For the last time he marked the pathetic droop

of the finely curved lips, coral against the ivory of cheek and chin, lips revealing the teeth which were such an admirable finish to the face. Her dark hair, with the dull red glow upon it, curving deliciously from the forehead, was held together at the top by a white niphétos rose he had given her. She was like the rose, he reflected, a blossom of the earth, sweet, lovely, ephemeral. He could not conceive her old, faded, crushed beneath the relentless touch of time.

The fancy possessed him that she was his, to be taken whithersoever he might go. He stretched out his hands, trembling with passion, and the vision melted. He grasped the cold snow, not the warm flesh.

At this moment, out of the suffocating silence an attenuated vibration of sound thrilled his senses. Instantly he was awake, alert—conscious that help was coming; how and whence he knew not. The sound permeated every fibre, but, numbed by exposure and fatigue, he was unable to interpret its message. Such as it was, it possessed rhythm—a systole and diastole, like the laboured beating of his heart. Was it merely the heart, recording with solemn knell the passing of a soul? No—no! He sprang to his feet, aflame once more with the lust of life. The sound he heard was no delusion of a fanciful brain, no fluttering of a moribund heart, but a clarion note from without, steadily increasing in volume, forcing a passage through the blinding snows—the Crask bell!

But at first he was unable to localise the sound: plunging madly this way and that, settling down at length to his true course, which brought him within half an hour to the bridge across the burn. Even then he strayed again and again from the road, led back to it as often by the voice of the bell, growing clearer and louder with every step he took. Presently he heard voices, hoarse shouts, which he answered in feeble whispers; then a yellow light swinging to and fro shone through the darkness. He staggered on to meet it, falling fainting into the arms of Stride.

* * * * *

Stride asked no questions. Mark was put to bed, and lay still for some four hours: then he began to grind his teeth, to clench his fists. Stride sat beside him watching his friend and patient, with eyes half shut, like a purring cat's, the pupils narrowed to a black slit. Presently he went to the window. The wind had ceased. Outside, in silence, the snow kept on falling, spreading its pall upon the world, while the cold grew more and more intense. The crystals were forming upon the pane, and despite the big peat fire, the temperature in the room fell point after point. Staring through the pane, Stride could see nothing save the piled-up snow on the sill, and the myriad fluttering flakes beyond: each, as he knew, a crystal of surpassing symmetry and loveliness, each fashioned by the Master in His sky

and despatched to earth, there to be destroyed, trodden, maybe, into mire and filth, and, rising again, seeking the skies anew, to be transformed by the same Hand into rain, or dew, or sleet, or snow, ordained to fall as before, and as before to rise, the eternal symbol of the soul which descends into the clay, softens it, is tainted and discoloured by it, and then, in glorious resurrection, ascends to be purged and purified in the place whence it came.

CHAPTER XXIII
HYMENEAL

Upon the morning of his wedding-day, Archibald Samphire went into the church of King's Charteris and prayed before the altar. While he was praying, Jim Corrance pushed aside the heavy curtain of the west door and peered in. A whim had seized him. He, the freethinker, the agnostic, had said to himself that he would like to spend a few minutes alone in the church where he had been baptised and confirmed. Rank sentiment! But Jim at heart was a man of sentiment, although he took particular pains to prove to the world that he was nothing of the sort.

When Jim saw Archibald's fine figure he frowned, thrusting forward his square chin, and the short hair on the top of his head bristled with exasperation. Upon each side of the kneeling man were ferns and palms, whose fronds touched overhead. The priests' stalls were ablaze with daffodils and primroses picked by the school-children in the water meadows and woods near Pitt Hall. Through the east window a May sun streamed in full flood of prismatic colour. The pure rays of the sun passing through the gorgeous glass absorbed its tints and flung them lavishly here and there, staining with crimson, or blue, or yellow, the white lilies which stood upon the altar. Jim smiled derisively. The fancy struck him that Archie's prayers would absorb, so to speak, the colours of his mind. The words of the General Thanksgiving occurred to Jim.

"And we beseech Thee, give us that due sense of all Thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth Thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to Thy service, and by walking before Thee in holiness and righteousness all our days."

Surely this set—so Jim reflected—forth Archibald Samphire's pious ambition. Doubtless he did aspire to give himself to God's service, particularly that form of it which is held in cathedrals; and he intended, honestly enough, to walk before Him (and before the world) in holiness and righteousness all his days (which he had reason to believe would be long and fruitful).

Archibald rose and walked down the aisle. Jim hid himself behind the tall font, but he stared curiously at his old school-fellow. Archibald's face had lost its normal expression of a satisfaction too smug to please such a critical gentleman as Mr. James Corrance. His massive features were troubled. He looked humble! Why? Surely the crimson carpet beneath his feet, bordered with flowers, over-shadowed by exquisite ferns and rare shrubs, indicated the procession of a successful life: a majestic march through the hallowed places of Earth to the Heaven of All Saints beyond!

Had Jim been able to peer within that mighty body, he might have seen a self-confidence strangely deflated, a conscience quickened by pangs. The colossus, whose physical prowess had become a glorious tradition at Harrow and Cambridge, knew himself to be a moral coward, inasmuch as he had withheld a vital truth from the woman he loved. Fear of losing, first, her good opinion of him, then the greater fear of losing the woman altogether, had withered again and again the impulse to say frankly: "Mark wrote the two sermons which have made me what I am." Unable to say this, realising that the many opportunities for speech had passed, he had just vowed solemnly that his transgression should be expiated by hard work in his new parish. Truly—as Lady Randolph had said—was Archibald Samphire an unconscious humourist! And before we leave him to return to Jim, let it be added that the big fellow did not know (and being the man he was could not possibly have known) that he had wooed Betty with Mark's words, that he would have wooed in vain with his own. Not unreasonably, he was absolutely convinced that the qualities which had won success in everything undertaken by him had assured this also, the greatest prize of all, a tender, loving wife.

Jim waited till five minutes had passed, then he strolled back to his mother's house, telling himself that he was a brute, a dog in the manger, because he had misjudged a God-fearing fellow-creature, immeasurably his superior, who had won in fair competition a prize beyond his (Jim's) deserts.

When he returned to his mother's house a trim parlourmaid handed him a note. She told him at the same time that Mrs. Corrance was taking breakfast in her own room. Jim nodded, and broke the seal: a lilac wafer with Betty Kirtling's initials entwined in a cypher.

”Dear old Jim” (Betty wrote): ”please come up after breakfast and take me for a walk.

”Your affectionate Betty.”

Betty was installed in The Whim for her wedding; and the Randolphs and Harry Kirtling—not to mention other relations—were keeping her company. Since her engagement had been announced, Jim had scarcely seen her. He had taken the news hard. His clerks, and the jobbers with whom he dealt found him difficult to please, argumentative, contemptuous, and a glutton for work throughout that Lenten season.

As Jim approached The Whim, Betty joined him on the drive. He saw that she was very pale.

”How good of you to come,” she exclaimed.

”Good!” growled Jim. ”As if I wouldn't cross the Atlantic or the Styx to walk with you. Where shall we go?”

Betty took a path which led to the lane running at right angles to the Westchester road. High hedges bordered this lane, with ancient yew trees at uncertain intervals. To the right lay the best arable land in King's Charteris, rich alluvial soil, now green with spring wheat; to the left, the ground ascended in undulating slopes of pasture till it melted in the downs beyond.

”Sun is going to shine on you,” said Jim.

The sun was blazing in a sky limpid after a week's heavy rain. Beneath its warm beams the soaked landscape seemed to be smiling with satisfaction. A peculiar odour of fertility, pungent and potent, assailed the nostrils, the odour of spring, the odour of earth renascent, rejuvenated, once more a bride.

”I wish it were June instead of May, Jim.”

”That's the most absurd superstition.”

”Jim, I want to ask a question. Have you seen or heard of Mark?”

Jim looked cross.

”He's in Sutherland.”

”Go on, please.”

”He doesn't answer my letters,” said Jim, after a pause.

”He writes to nobody.”

”Did you expect him to write?”

”Yes, I did,” said Betty vehemently. ”If it had been an ordinary man, but Mark—Heavens! Why should I beat about the bush with you, Jim? Once I wanted to marry Mark! You know that. But he didn't want—me.”

She paused, blushing, her eyes, pools of brown light, opened wide with their strange look: entreating, interrogating.

”Which was a woman's reason, I suppose, for engaging yourself to some-

body who did."

The words slipped from him. Caring for Mark, how could she have accepted Archibald? That cried to Heaven for explanation. He stared at her, seeing no reproach in her eyes, only a soft shadow of wonder—or was it regret—or something subtler than either.

"Oh, Jim, feeling as you do about religion, you can't understand. I was looking down, down into the depths. Archie taught me to look up."

"To him?"

"To God."

"You say that Archibald Samphire revealed God to you?"

"In that sermon at Windsor—yes. If you had heard it——"

"I heard of it. You will be the wife of a bishop some day."

He tried to give the conversation a lighter turn, fearing that she would speak again of Mark, understanding at last that Mark, standing under sentence of death, had deliberately hidden his heart from her. What else could such a man have done? And if Betty realised this, even now, at the eleventh hour, she might refuse to marry the silver-tongued brother. And because the temptation to tell her the truth was so poignant, he resisted it. It lay on his tongue's tip to exclaim: "Good Lord! Is it possible that you, with your intuitions and sympathies, have failed to divine Mark's love for you? Can't you understand that his love keeps him in Sutherland, that he dares not write for fear that he should reveal it?" At the same time, he knew that marriage between any young woman and a man suffering from an almost incurable malady was unthinkable. And if Betty could not marry Mark, was it not better from every point of view that she should marry his brother? Would not he (Jim) be taking upon himself a terrible responsibility if he broke the silence which Mark's self-sacrifice had made sacred? These, and a thousand other thoughts, jostled each other in his brain.

"That sermon touched me at first, because I thought it was Mark speaking. Not till then had I realised that Archie possessed the wonderful power of making life easier, happier, ampler; but why does Mark, if he cares nothing for me, stand aloof, why—why?"

"It is strange," he admitted slowly.

"Ah," she cried, "you say that reservedly. You, too, have guessed or at least suspected——"

"What?"

"That Mark is—jealous—of—Archie." The words dropped from her lips as if she loathed them, as if she loathed herself for speaking them. She continued quickly: "At Westchester, he was alone with me. I was thrilling with surprise and admiration. We had underrated Archie; you know that, Jim. And he had vindicated himself so gloriously. Well, Mark said nothing, not a word of praise.

Oh, it was ungenerous—abominable! But I did not think so then. But now, what other interpretation can I put upon his silence?"

When she paused, Jim burst into a vehement defence of Mark. He spoke as he spoke to his clerks, clenching his fists, thrusting out his chin, repeating his phrases: "What? You say that? You use such words as abominable, ungenerous? You, Betty Kirtling? Abominable? Ungenerous? Well, if he be jealous, is it surprising, is it not most natural? Abominable? Great Scott! He looks at the man, the brother, who has everything, everything which he lacks—the physical strength, the persuasive voice, the luck—the devil's own luck—I don't pick my words, Betty Kirtling! Why—if he were not jealous, if envy at times did not tear him, he would not be Mark at all, but some impeccable, immaculate humbug! Abominable! From—you!"

Betty turned her back, and walked down the lane; Jim hesitated, and pursued.

"Betty, forgive me! I'm a brute, and this, this is your wedding-day. Here, give me your hand, both hands! That's better. Tell me I'm a beast. I deserve kicking. I'll lie down and let you wipe your boots on me. Your wedding-day—and I've treated you to this."

The feeling in his face went straight to her heart.

"It's all right, Jim," she whispered, half crying, half laughing. "And I take back—abominable." She sighed, gazing towards the downs where she and Mark had played truant. Then, with quivering lips and wet eyes, she murmured, "Poor Mark—poor Mark!" disengaged her hands, and ran down the lane and out of sight.

After the wedding there was an old-fashioned breakfast at The Whim, with toasts, speeches, cutting of cake, and so forth. Slowshire came in force, ate largely, drank deeply, and made merry in the solid, stodgy, Slowshire way. None the less, to Lady Randolph and other less acute observers, the function was somewhat depressing. The Whim, where so many cheery gatherings had taken place, had been sold. The furniture was to be moved into the Samphires' London house, while the bride and groom were on their honeymoon. The Squire's wife, in purple satin slashed with heliotrope silk, supplied every guest who belonged to the county families with details.

"The dear couple will be so comfortable. No—there is no rectory. They will live in Cadogan Place. Lord Minstead was glad to sell the lease. They say, you know, that he—pst—pst—pst——" The speaker's prominent blue eyes seemed positively to bulge from her plump, pink cheeks, as she whispered Minstead's unsavoury story into attentive ears. "But, as I was saying, our dear couple—really the handsomest couple I ever saw in my life—will be *très bien installés.* I

am to find them a cook—fifty-five pounds a year—do you know of one? She must be a *cordon bleu.* Yes, a kitchen *and* a scullery-maid. They are very well off, very well off indeed. It is expected that they will entertain——"

The Squire, meantime, exchanged a few words with his old friend Lady Randolph. His face was flushed and his eyes congested and very puffy below the lids. Lips and chin, too, had a faint purplish tinge, always seen on the faces of those afflicted by a certain form of heart disease. He was certainly failing, Lady Randolph reflected. Still, he had lived his life, enjoyed the cakes and ale—too much of them!—and might reckon himself amongst the lucky ones. Pomméry had loosened his tongue.

"They will have—this between ourselves, my dear lady—nearly five thousand a year. Archie has done well. I am very proud of Archie—a fine fellow—hay? You may call him that—a fine fellow—a very fine fellow indeed! Sound"—the Squire thumped his own broad chest—"sound as I am, sound as a bell, and likely to make old bones."

Lady Randolph, with eyes half closed, nodded, wondering if this pitiful assumption of high health were genuine or assumed. Surely the Squire must know himself to be no sounder than a big pippin rotten at the core. He stood beside her, tall, portly, scrupulously dressed as a country gentleman of the old school; and the purple flush deepened and spread as he talked.

"Archibald will be a bishop. Do you know that his portrait is coming out in *Vanity Fair*? The Chrysostom of Sloane Street they call him. His Advent sermons have been widely discussed. And he will have no land to bother him. These are hard times for us landowners. Is Randolph pinched? Of course, he has his town property; but it's different with me; it's the very deuce with me. I'm worried to death about it."

What was fermenting in his mind had come, as it generally does with such men, to the surface. Lady Randolph looked unaffectedly sorry, and expressed her sympathy. The Squire plunged into the interminable subject of falling prices, rates, impoverished soil, the difficulty of finding good tenant farmers, and so forth. Not till the bride entered did he cease from his jeremiads.

"Here is Betty," said Lady Randolph.

She wore a travelling dress of pale grey cloth edged and lined with lavender silk. Betty had refused to adorn herself in bright colours, which happened to suit her admirably. A parson's wife, she observed, should dress soberly, and she quoted the Vicar of Wakefield, to Lady Randolph's great amusement. A controversy had arisen over this particular frock. Betty, however, seconded by the dressmaker, had her own way about it. Now Lady Randolph was certain that her protests had been justifiable. The dress, lovely though it was in texture and fit, had a faded appearance; it suggested autumn instead of spring, dun October, not

merry May.

Betty tripped here and there, bidding her friends and neighbours good-bye, while Archie stood smiling at the door. He looked very large and imposing in a rough grey serge suit, which fused happily the clerical garb with that of a bridegroom. Calm and dignified, he received the congratulations of the men. Once or twice he drew a gold watch from his pocket—a present from the Dean and Chapter—opened it, glanced at it, and closed it with a loud click. He had never missed a train, but the possibility of doing so now impended.

Mrs. Samphire held her handkerchief to her face. Mrs. Corrance's handkerchief was in her pocket, but her kind eyes were wet. The young men from the barracks were laughing loudly, cracking jokes with the bridesmaids, "whooping things up a bit." The elderly guests smiled blandly, thinking possibly of their own weddings. The children alone really enjoyed themselves. Jim Corrance waited till the bride had passed him; then he rushed into the dining-room, where he found two generals and an Indian judge solemnly employed in finishing the Admiral's famous Waterloo brandy.

"Wonderful stuff," said the judge, as he passed the decanter to Jim; "it puts everything right—eh?"

Jim nodded. Through the open doors, leading into the hall, he could see Betty run down the stairs, followed by Archibald.

The Squire called after her: "God bless you, my dear! God bless you!"

She was gone.

Jim went out of the dining-room, which was situated, it will be remembered, at the top of The Whim. Most of the guests had followed the bride and groom downstairs. Upon the Persian carpet lay a small spray of lilies of the valley, fallen from Betty's bouquet. Jim glanced to right and left. Nobody was looking at him. Furtively, scarlet in the face, he stalked and bagged the spray of lilies. He placed it carefully in his pocket-book.

"That's the last of our Betty," he said.

CHAPTER XXIV
A RED TIE

Archibald had ordered a coupé to be ready for him at Westchester, but when the Bournemouth express dashed up, the stationmaster was obliged to confess that

a blunder had taken place; no coupé was on the train. A first-class carriage was found, in which two seats were already occupied.

"Somebody ought to be censured for this," said the bridegroom, as the train slid out of the station. "It's inexcusable carelessness. I shall write to the directors about it."

"Pray don't," said Betty. "The matter's not worth a penny stamp."

"We shall find a coupé at Victoria," he whispered, bending forward. They were *en route* for France, having agreed to spend their honeymoon in Touraine. Betty glanced at the elderly couple, whose curiosity had been quickened. Archibald drew back with a slight frown. "I shall write from Dover," he said. "I regard it as a duty."

Betty pouted, surprised that he should treat her injunction so cavalierly. Men, she reflected, were men, and must be humoured. After all, her husband's annoyance was a compliment to her. She blushed as she lay back against the cushions, shutting her eyes. Her *husband*! She repeated the word very softly, the colour ebbing and flowing in her cheeks, as she gave herself up to the thought of him. Archibald said nothing; that was tactful. He had plenty of tact—a great gift—and most agreeable manners. Suddenly she realised that she was making an inventory of his good qualities, repeating them to herself like a parrot. She sat up, opening her eyes, opening them indeed wider than usual when she saw what had happened. Archibald had risen early; he had spent a busy and exciting morning; he had made an excellent breakfast, although, being a total abstainer, he had refused the Pomméry and Waterloo brandy. Now, not being able to talk to his bride in the presence of strangers, seeing that she wanted to rest and reflect, he had settled himself comfortably into his corner and—had fallen asleep!

Betty eyed him furtively. She did not like to wake him, but his appearance distressed her. She bent forward and touched his arm.

"Dear me," he said. "I saw you close your eyes, Betty, and I closed mine. You did right to wake me."

"I couldn't help it," she replied. "Your hat had fallen over your left eye. It made you look—ridiculous."

They spoke in whispers, leaning forward, so that their heads almost touched. But at the word "ridiculous" the bridegroom winced.

Betty had pierced a sensitive skin. Seeing this, she tried to turn the incident into a joke, laughing lightly, sorry that she should have hurt him, yet still seeing the hat tilted over the left eye.

At Victoria the coupé was awaiting them. The train, however, had only just backed into the station and would not leave for a quarter of an hour. Archibald and Betty arranged their belongings, and proceeded to walk up and down the platform. A great station was a never-failing source of interest to Betty. The

infinite variety of faces, the bustle, the pervading air of change and motion, even the raucous, ear-splitting sounds, stimulated her imagination. Nothing amused her more than to invent stories concerning fellow-travellers. She brought to this an ingenuity and an insight which had often delighted Lady Randolph. Now, as usual, her eye drifted here and there in search of some attractive lay figure. As a rule she selected someone out of the ordinary groove. The flare of an eye, the twist of a moustache, a peculiarity in figure or gait instantly aroused her interest. Passing the bookstall, she saw a man in an Inverness cape made out of Harris tweed. Because he had the appearance of coming straight from Scotland, she examined him more closely. At the moment he turned, and their eyes met. The stranger was very brown of complexion and wore a beard, but the eyes, blue eyes with sparkling pin-points of frosty light, were Mark's eyes.

"That's Mark!" said Betty excitedly, clutching her husband's arm. "Look—look!"

Archibald looked and laughed.

"You have an amazing imagination, my dearest Mark? That man in home-spun, and a red tie! He's twice Mark's size, and he wears a beard. I noticed him just now. Mark? Why Mark's in Sutherland."

"I was mistaken," said Betty absently. She walked on quite sure that the man's eyes were following her. She was sure of it, although her back was turned to him. A minute before Archibald had asked her if she would like a tea-basket. The refreshment-room was just opposite. An impulse seized her.

"I think I should like a tea-basket," she said, pausing. "Will you get one? I'll go back to the carriage."

Archibald obeyed, unsuspecting. Betty turned and ran to the bookstall. The man was no longer there. She looked right and left. That was he—disappearing, melting into the crowd outside. Without a moment's hesitation she hastened after him, came up behind, plucked at his cape. He turned at once. It was Mark.

"You?" she gasped. "*You*—here?"

Her eyes, wide open, glaring interrogation, fell before his. He took her hand, grasping it firmly.

"I can explain. I heard of your plans from Mrs. Samphire. I knew that you were leaving by this train. I came on the off chance of getting a glimpse of you."

"You are well, *strong*!"

She raised her eyes, devouring him. He could see that people in the crowd were nudging each other, grinning and pointing. He drew her aside.

"Yes; I am strong." As he said it, he realised that he would need all his strength. What a mad fool he had been to come, to risk so much. "Look here," he said harshly, "you must go back to Archie. Tell him—tell him that I couldn't come to his wedding, because, b-b-because I've left the Church. I wasn't going

to set every tongue wagging in Slowshire. Do you see? Do you understand? Now—go—run!"

He almost pushed her from him. Her eyes never left his face.

"Can't you see me to my carriage?"

This, the obvious thing, had not occurred to him. He walked beside her. As they passed into the station, Archibald appeared on the platform, followed by a boy carrying a tea-basket.

"It *is* Mark," said Betty, as her husband joined them. They walked towards the carriage, the most amazing trio in that vast station. Mark repeated his reasons for not taking part in the wedding. Archibald looked confused.

"You have left our Church?"

He repeated it three times.

"Yes; yes—we can't go into reasons here and now."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am writing."

The guard began to slam the doors. He came up to the brothers, smiling, seeing the bride, feeling in his broad palm the tip of the bridegroom.

"Better get in, sir," he said to Mark, who, in his Inverness cape and rough cap, looked the traveller.

Archibald pushed Betty into the coupé and shook hands with Mark.

"You must tell us everything when we get back. It has been a great shock," he stared at the red tie; "but I'm delighted to see you looking so well."

He sprang into the coupé as the train began to move. Betty pushed him aside and leaned out of the window. Mark never forgot the expression on her face framed by the small, square window. The engine was screeching lamentably, like a monster in agony. Another train was entering the station, adding its strident note to the chorus, filling the atmosphere with clouds of white steam. A third-class carriage full of soldiers glided by. The soldiers, mostly boyish recruits, were singing at the top of their voices, "Good-bye, my lover, good-bye." A girl standing near burst into hysterical sobbing. Mark noted these details, as a man notes some irrelevant trifle in a dream, which remains part of that dream for ever after. But his eyes were on Betty's face. She had been borne away by a force slow but irresistible, the relentless Machine, the symbol of progress, of Fate, if you will, which tears asunder things and men, and brings some together again, but not all, nor any just as they were before. The face was white and piteous, the face of an Andromeda. Upon it, in unmistakable lines, were inscribed regret and reproach. Mark turned sick. He had wished to save this woman; had he sacrificed her?

Betty heard her husband say, "This has been very upsetting." Immediately she laughed, withdrawing her face from the window. Nothing else, probably, would have erased the tell-tale lines. She thought that her laugh was a revelation

of what was passing in her mind; but Archibald took other notice of it.

”You laugh?” he said heavily. ”I know what has happened. I am not much surprised. Mark has gone over to Rome. Really, my dear little woman, you must not laugh like that. I give you my word that I am terribly distressed. That red tie!”

”The scarlet woman.”

”Pray don’t joke! This is most upsetting.”

She laughed again, knowing that she was on the verge of hysterics, trying to control herself. The train, rushing on out of the mists of London into the splendid May sunshine of the country, rocked violently as it crossed the points. Betty fell back upon the cushions, still laughing and repeating Archibald’s words.

”Upsetting? I should think so.”

Like Mark, she was reflecting that Force was bearing her away, whirling her asunder, leaving heart and soul here, flinging her body there. The irony of it was stunning in its violence. She covered her face with her hands, pressing her finger-tips upon her temples, but she did not close her eyes, which followed Archibald’s slow, methodical movements. He was arranging the baggage—her handsome travelling-bag, a wedding present from the Squire, his own massive suit-case, the parasols and umbrellas, the tea-basket. In the contracted space wherein he moved he loomed colossal. She felt herself shrinking, collapsing. In a minute, a moment, he would turn, he would take her cold hands in his, removing them gently but masterfully from the face quivering beneath. Then he would surely read and know. He had nearly finished his fiddle-faddling arrangements. He took his hat from his head, looked at it, brushed a few specks of dust from the crown and rim, and placed it carefully in the rack. Out of the pocket of an overcoat he drew a soft travelling cap, putting it on deliberately, making himself comfortable. At last he was coming towards her, the tea-basket in his hand, a smile upon his face, an endearing phrase upon his lips. Betty closed her eyes. The words of the marriage service sounded loud in her ears, rhythmic, like the roar of waves breaking on an iron-bound coast: the echo of her oath before the altar thundering down the empty corridors of the future—”*From this day forward ... to love, cherish, and to obey till Death us do part!*”

Archibald dropped the tea-basket with a crash. His bride had fainted.

CHAPTER XXV

MARK HEARS A BLEATING

Two days later Mark Samphire called upon Jim Corrance at his chambers in Bolton Street, Piccadilly. Here Jim lived when he was not making money or playing golf at Woking. He played golf regularly to keep himself fit. He also played whist and billiards. Whatever he did, work or play, was characterised by a dexterity and fertility of resource which generally ensured success.

Jim's chambers were furnished comfortably but conventionally. As a matter of fact, he had told a famous firm of decorators to do the best they could for a certain sum of money. Jim added a few pictures and engravings, some books, and an impeccable manservant, Tom Wrenn. He did not look at the pictures or read the books, but he studied Wrenn, an interesting document, and mastered him. Wrenn, for his part, had nothing but praise for a gentleman who bought the best of wine and tobacco and entrusted them unreservedly to his man.

When Wrenn ushered Mark into the sitting-room, he exhibited no surprise, but his master stared at his old friend as if he (Mark) had risen from the dead. Mark, bearded, brown, sinewy, larger about the chest and shoulders, confounded Jim—and he said so in his usual abrupt, jerky fashion. Then he noted the rough tweeds and the red tie. Wrenn lingered for a moment.

"Wrenn," said Jim, "bring some whisky and mineral waters, and the Rothschild Excepcionales!" Wrenn vanished silently. Jim seized Mark by the coat.

"Why, this howls for explanation. You've chucked your black livery—*you*?"

The emphasis laid on the pronoun expressed surprise, incredulity, and amusement.

"Yes. I've come here to tell you all about it."

Wrenn appeared with a tray and a long, shallow box of cigars. Mark, however, preferred to light his pipe. As soon as Wrenn had left the room, he plunged into his story.

"There was just the possibility, you understand, of recovery. Archibald came up. He wanted me to go home, and he brought a message from Betty—her love. She was stopping with your mother. That message either meant everything or nothing. I knew that it meant—everything. Now, while Archibald was with me I did a bit of work, brain work, the first since the smash. It knocked me out—knocked all my hopes to smithereens. Would you under such conditions have sent back your love to Betty?"

"No," said Jim; "but—well, never mind; go on——"

"After Archibald had left Crask I took a big turn for the better. I suppose that glorious air and the simple food and Stride's knowledge of my case worked the miracle. And then I began to hope again; and I began to work." He told Jim about the first short story and the novel, but he did not mention the Advent sermons of his brother. "Time slipped by, Jim. I was awfully keen about my work."

"I'll bet you were," said Jim.

”You always chaffed me, because I said that in my philosophy things turned out for the best. I told myself that every incident in my life, every trial and infirmity, had meaning. Can a man write what is really vital unless he has striven and suffered and seen others striving and suffering? I say—no. God knows I longed to be a man of action. That was denied me. The desire to paint, to express what was in me on canvas, proved fruitless. Then the Church opened her doors—I saw a goal, but my stammer choked me at the start. All the same, the work in Stepney warmed me to the core. I was up to my neck in it.”

”And Betty?”

”Ah—Betty. She was out of sight, Jim, but never out of mind. A thousand times I told myself she was unattainable; that a man was a sickly anæmic ass who allowed a woman to interfere with what he had to do.”

”Right,” said Jim. ”That’s gospel.”

”All the same, she was back of everything. Then came last Whitsuntide——”

He paused. Jim continued: ”I know about that. I suppose you learned, then, of this cursed mischief inside you?”

”I suspected something; I went to Barger and Drax. They told me marriage was madness.”

”Great Scott!”

He was more agitated than Mark, thrusting out his chin, shaking his shoulders, clenching his fists: gestures familiar to Mark since the Harrow days and before. It struck Mark suddenly that this scene was recurrent, the ebb and flow of the heart’s tide breaking on rocks. Could anything be more futile than talk: the interminable recital of what was and what might have been? His voice, as he continued, lost its tonic quality:

”There is not much more to tell. Just as I began to hope that my life might still hold Betty, the news came of her engagement——”

Jim looked at the red tie.

”And then you saw red,” he spluttered, ”you saw red.”

”When that letter came, I could—have—killed—my—brother.”

The two men had risen and were staring at each other with flaming eyes.

”I could have killed him,” Mark repeated sombrely. ”You know, Jim, what Archie was to me at Harrow—and long afterwards?”

”The greatest thing on earth,” said Jim. ”I used to be awfully jealous.”

”I loved him for his beauty,” said Mark drearily, ”for his strength and for his weakness. I loved him the more because in some small ways I could help him. I grudged him nothing—I swear it!—nothing, *nothing*, except Betty. I could have let her go to you or Harry Kirtling; but to him who had all I had not, my b-b-brother——”

His stammer seized him, and he trembled violently.

”We’ll drop it,” exclaimed Jim. He had turned away from Mark’s eyes, reading in them the hate which was not yet controlled. ”You don’t feel—er—that way towards *her*?”

”Never, never!” His eyes softened at once; then he broke out abruptly: ”What made her take him?” It was out at last. He expected no answer from his friend, but Jim said simply: ”Surely you know?”

”It’s darkest mystery.”

”Why, man, she told me that he dragged her out of the depths.” Jim repeated what Betty had said. ”You know what women are. A petticoat flutters naturally towards a parson whenever the wind blows. That did me. *I* couldn’t promise to personally conduct her to—Heaven. Yes, his sermons, particularly that Windsor sermon, captured her.”

”The Windsor sermon! You say the Windsor s-s-sermon?” Mark stuttered out.

”Yes, the Windsor sermon. I’m told it was wonderful. He’s a bit of a prig, but he can preach, and no mistake! Why, look here! Have you seen this? Out this morning!”

He took up the current *Vanity Fair* and displayed a caricature of Archibald Samphire—the Chrysostom of Sloane Street. It was one of Pellegrini’s best bits of work, but the ”fine animal” in Archibald had been slightly overdrawn, unintentionally, no doubt, on the artist’s part. The florid complexion, the massive jaw, the curls, the lips, were subtly exaggerated. None would be surprised to learn that Chrysostom lived in Cadogan Place with a *cordon bleu* at fifty-five pounds a year. Mark gazed at the cartoon and then laid it, face downwards, on the table.

”The thing’s wonderful,” he said slowly, ”but it will hurt Betty.”

Jim Corrance shrugged his shoulders. He had come to the conclusion that a touch of the animal in men was not a disability where women were concerned.

”I saw them at Victoria,” said Mark.

”What?”

Mark explained, blaming himself.

”You’ve given yourself away,” said Jim disgustedly. ”She had got it into her head that you didn’t care, but the man who doesn’t care would hardly travel from Sutherland to London to catch one glimpse of another fellow’s bride. Lord! You have made a mess of it. And what are you going to do now? Have a drink, and tell me your plans.”

”I’m going to write.”

”Have you rewritten the novel you burnt?”

”No; but I’m half-way through another.”

”You may as well camp with me. Why not?”

Mark had several reasons ”why not,” but he gave one which was sufficient:

"I mean to eat and sleep and work out-of-doors."

The two men talked together for an hour and then parted.

"By the way," said Jim, as Mark was taking leave, "the Squire is looking rather seedy. I fancy he's something on his mind. Are you going down to King's Charteris?"

Mark shook his head impatiently, hearing a terrible bleating; but as he passed through the Green Park, on the way to his lodgings, he reflected that he would have to go to Pitt Hall sooner or later. Why not sooner? He would run down the next day. Then, he repeated to himself what Jim Corrance had said about Archibald's sermons, and their effect on Betty. Looking back now, with an odd sense of detachment, he realised how much of these sermons had been his, how little Archibald's. For this he blamed himself. His brother had asked for an inch. He had given gladly an ell. But if—the possibility insisted on obtruding itself (an unwelcome guest)—if Betty discovered the truth, what would happen?

When he reached his lodging he wrote a letter to the Squire, saying that he was running down on the morrow and preparing him for a change of cloth.

"I no longer count myself of the Church of England" (he wrote), "but you will be doing the wise thing and the kind thing if you ask no questions."

This bolt from the blue fell on to the breakfast-table. Mrs. Samphire, like Archibald, jumped to the conclusion that Mark had gone over to Rome.

"I knew how it would be," she said acidly, "from the very beginning. I dare say he will arrive with his head shaved and wearing a cowl. And you were saying only yesterday that he could have the King's Charteris living, now that Archie is provided for."

"The boy is a good lad," said the Squire heavily. "I shall talk to him. He must take the King's Charteris living, he *must.* I shall make a point of it. He can keep a curate to preach. It's the obvious way out of the wood."

"Then he won't take it."

She burst into detraction of the boy who was like the woman the Squire had loved. The Squire listened moodily, eating his substantial breakfast of kidneys and poached eggs and a slice from the ham of his own curing.

"He is not a Samphire at all," concluded the lady, as she rose from the table, leaving the Squire still eating, very red in the face where the colour was not purple, and showing a massive jowl above his neatly folded white scarf. Left alone, he cut himself another slice from the huge ham, and then reread Mark's letter, staring at it with congested eyes, and muttering: "Yes, yes—it's the obvious

way out of the wood, the obvious way out of the wood. He can keep a curate who can preach. Four hundred a year, even in these times, and a capital house, a really capital house, in first-rate repair. I shall talk to him. The Madam doesn't like him—never did! But he'll listen to his old pater. It's the obvious way out of the wood."

Mark arrived in time for tea. Mrs. Samphire received him in the long, narrow drawing-room; and Mark was conscious that his red tie was to her as a red rag to a bull. When she spoke, sniffs were audible; and Mark kept on telling himself that he had been a fool to come. The Squire seemed very robust. What did Jim mean? The congested eyes, the purple tinge, conveyed no meaning to a man who had never learned the meaning of health's danger-signals.

After dinner father and son found themselves alone. The Squire had ordered a bottle of '47 port to be decanted, almost the last that was left in the bin. He had to drink most of it, and while he did so complained of the changes since *his* day.

"Archie is teetotal," he said. "Well he's playing his own game his own way, and scoring too, no doubt o' that. I dare say you forget that now he's provided so well for himself, you can step into the King's Charteris living, which in the nature of things must soon be vacant. Nearly four hundred a year—and a capital house, in first-rate repair. You can hire a curate who can preach."

The words came out very fluently, for the Squire had repeated them to himself a dozen times since breakfast. As Mark made no reply, he repeated them again, adding, however, somewhat confusedly: "It's the obvious way out of the wood."

"Eh?" said Mark. "What do you mean, pater?"

The Squire coughed nervously. He was not clever at making explanations.

"Oh," he replied testily, "I take it we needn't go into that. Times are hard. The allowance I have made you and Archie has crippled me. Archie gave up his when he came into Aunt Deb's money—and in the nick of time, egad!"

"I can get along with a hundred a year," said Mark quietly.

"Rubbish, my dear lad, rubbish! But the living's a good 'un, and the house in capital repair. You would be very comfortable; and," he eyed Mark pleasantly, "and you'll be following Archie's example—hey? Marry a girl with a bit o' money! There's Kitty Bowker, and——"

"Pater—we won't talk of that."

"We? I'm talking of it. I don't ask you to say a word, not a word. Oh, I know why you didn't come to Archie's wedding, but bless you, Betty's not the only nice girl in the world. I'll say no more. I'm glad to see you looking so fit. That slumming in the East End disgusted you—drove you into that tweed suit—hey? But it'll be quite different at King's Charteris. You can manage a day's

hunting a week and a day's shooting throughout the season. Kitty Bowker looks very well outside a horse—and she likes a man who goes free at his fences as you used to do. Your letter this morning, you know, startled us a bit. The Madam thought of Rome. Nothing in that—hey?"

The Squire looked hard at the decanter which indeed was quite empty.

"Absolutely nothing," said Mark absently.

"I told the Madam I'd say a word, and there it is: a capital house, in excellent repair, with——"

"The present incumbent still alive," said Mark.

"True, true—we'll say no more, not a word. Shall we go into the drawing-room?"

He rose with a certain effort and moved too ponderously towards the door. For the first time Mark realised that his father must soon become an old man. A wave of affection surged through him.

"Pater," he said, touching the Squire's massive shoulder, "how are you feeling? Any twinges of gout or—er—anything of that sort?"

"I'm sound as a bell, Mark. Of course I have my worries. There are three farms on my hands, and the price of corn lower than it has been for years. I don't know what George will do after I'm gone. That is why I—um—spoke of the obvious way out of the wood. Put on a black tie to-morrow morning, my dear lad, and—er—a grey suit, to—to oblige me."

"All right," said Mark. "I'm going to write, you know."

"Write?" the Squire turned, as he was passing into the hall. "Write—what?"

"Novels, short stories, plays perhaps."

"Oh, d——n it!" said the Squire ruefully.

CHAPTER XXVI
READJUSTMENT

After Mark's return from Pitt Hall, he called on Barger and Drax, who overhauled him and pronounced him a new man. Drax, in particular, took extraordinary interest in the case, refused a fee, and begged Mark to come and see him at least once a quarter.

"I never thought I should speak to you again," he said frankly. "It's the *vis medicatrix naturæ*. You went back to the simple primal life. Well—stick to it! A

winter in Sutherland! Phew-w-w! Kill or cure, and no mistake. I should like to meet your friend, Doctor Stride."

The question now presented itself: where should he pitch his tent? Such work as he had in mind must be finished in or near London. His half-completed novel, *Shall the Strong Retain the Spoil?* dealt with Londoners; the scene of it was laid in London. Finally, after some search, he found a camping-ground in a small pine wood crowning a great ridge which overlooked the Thames Valley and the Surrey heaths.

He discovered this spot, which suited him exactly, by accident. Just outside Weybridge he punctured the tyre of his bicycle. While repairing it, he smelled the balsamic fragrance of some pines to his right, and Longfellow's lines came into his mind:—

"Stood the groves of singling pine trees,
Green in summer, white in winter,
Ever sighing, ever singing."

The west wind was blowing, and from the pine-tops floated a lullaby, soothing and seductive. Mark sat down, listening to this alluring song, absorbing the scents and sounds. Presently he climbed a rough fence and wandered down one of the many aisles. The carpet beneath his feet was soft as velvet pile, a carpet woven by the years out of the myriad leaves dropping unseen and unheard. Passing through the wood, he saw the Thames Valley. A silvery mist was rising out of it. On each side of the river were green meadows, bordered by poplars and willows. The tower of a church could be seen amongst a group of fine elms. This was such a spot as he had hoped to find. Regaining the high-road, he pushed his bicycle to the top of the hill and stopped opposite a pretty cottage standing in a garden gay with old-fashioned flowers. Above the gate was a sign: *Board and Lodging*. Mark stared for a moment at the sign, smiling, because he had expected to find it there. If the tiny wood belonged to the owner of the cottage, the matter was clinched.

He left his bicycle against the palings and walked through the garden and up to the door. He had time to note that the cottage was built of brick. Some of the bricks had a vitreous surface, which caught the light and suffused a radiance over the other bricks. The general effect was ripe, mellow, rosy. The sills and casings of the lattice windows were painted white; the door was a bright apple-green, with a shining brass handle, bell, and knocker. The cottage was heavily thatched.

In answer to Mark's ring and knock the door was opened by a girl, whom

Mark guessed to be a daughter of the house, not a servant in any sense, save the one that she served. Mark lifted his cap.

"Is that wood yours?" he asked.

The girl seemed amused, but she said: "Oh, yes; everything inside the paling belongs to mother."

"And you have rooms to let?"

The girl asked him to come in and see them, but she added doubtfully: "I don't think they'll suit you."

"I haven't seen them yet," said Mark, "but I'm sure they will."

The rooms included a small sitting-room and bedroom. Mark looked at them with an indifference which brought disappointment to the face of the girl.

"Can I speak to your mother?"

"She's an invalid—and in bed, to-day. If you want to talk business you must talk with me."

Mark explained that he was anxious to build a shelter in the garden, at the edge of the wood. He added that unless the weather was unusually severe he should sleep, and eat, and work there. The rooms would do for a friend, who might come to see him from Saturday to Monday. He should want the simplest food, and so forth. The girl said that the carrying of meals to the shelter would be a nuisance, especially in rainy weather. Mark compromised by offering to eat indoors if the weather became wet or boisterous. A bargain was made in three minutes.

"When will you come?" said the girl.

"To-morrow. My name is Mark Samphire."

"Mother's name is Dew. I am Mary Dew."

"Mary Dew," repeated Mark. He had a tobacco-pouch in his hand and was filling a pipe. A pun occurred to him, execrable and therefore irresistible. "Honeydew is my constant companion," said he; "it is quite certain that we shall be friends."

Mary laughed.

"I hope so," she said frankly. "It's dreadful waiting on people one doesn't like. Last summer we had a gentleman who——"

"Yes," said Mark, lighting his pipe.

"Who wasn't a gentleman—and I hated him."

She looked serious. Her face was charming, because the texture of skin and the colouring were so admirable. For the rest she was about middle height, of trim figure, neither thin nor plump: her eyes were of a clear, intelligent grey, shaded by short black lashes which gave them distinction and vivacity. Long lashes may be a beauty in themselves, but they conceal rather than reveal the eyes behind them. Mary had brown hair, and plenty of it, simply arranged; her mouth was

wide and amply provided with white, even teeth; her nose was certainly tip-tilted. Altogether a young woman at whom most men would look with pleasure.

As she stood in the garden, the May sun falling full upon her, every line of face and figure suggested Spring: Spring in Arcady, fresh, joyous, radiant. Mark was artist enough to perceive the delicious half-tones, the tender shades beneath the round chin and about the finely modelled cheeks. If Pynsent saw her, he would be mad to paint her, there, in the crisp sunlight, amongst the honeysuckle, with the pines "ever sighing, ever singing" behind her.

Suddenly, a thin, querulous note seemed to pierce the silence of the garden.

"Mary—Mary!"

"Mother wants me. Good-bye, Mr. Samphire."

Mark held out his hand.

"Good-bye—till to-morrow."

He turned and moved down the path. Again that thin, querulous note pierced the silence. *Mary, Mary!* an appeal from age to youth, ay, and a protest, a far-reaching protest, of pain against pleasure. Mark pictured the invalid mother, bedridden, possibly, dependent upon the ministrations of others, calling out of the dismal seclusion of her chamber to the young, healthy creature in the garden. He mounted his bicycle, wondering whether Mary had grown accustomed to that heart-piercing note, speculating vaguely in regard to its meaning for her and for others.

Within a week the shelter was built. Stout posts upheld a roof of tongue-and-groove boards spread with a rough thatch; the floor was boarded also and covered with sailcloth, which could be washed and scrubbed like the deck of a ship. Two walls were also boarded. These were lined with shelves, which contained a miscellaneous collection of some four hundred books. The south and west sides of the shelter were open to the wind and sun, but could be closed, if necessary, by sailcloth curtains. A large table stood in the centre; a bed, serving as a sofa in daytime, occupied one corner; in another were an exerciser, a punching-ball, and some light clubs and dumbbells; chairs, a typewriter, a small stove, and a huge chest completed the furnishings.

When it was finished Pynsent and Jim Corrance were invited to inspect and criticise. Pynsent brought with him a couple of *mezari*, those quaint, decorative shawls worn by the women of Genoa, and draped them cleverly; Corrance brought an Indian rug. Both men were charmed with the cottage, the garden, the grove, and the view. Pynsent, as Mark had foreseen, wanted to paint Mary Dew, but every hour of the weeks between June and August was engaged. "You're a tremendous worker," said Jim.

”So are you, Corrance. A man must work nowadays, if he means to keep his place in the procession. The competition is frightful all along the line. I shall paint Mary Dew in the autumn. What do you call her, Mark?”

”Honey. Honey Dew. Do you see? A poor pun, but my own. She’s sweet as honey and fresh as dew, but her mother is a terrible person.”

He described an interview with Mrs. Dew.

”Mary told me that her mother wished to see me. I found her in her own sitting-room, the prettiest and most comfortable room in the cottage. Everything deliciously fresh—chintzes, flowers, paper on the wall, matting—and in the middle Mrs. Dew: faded, peevish, puckered, old beyond her years. Picture to yourselves a puffy, yellow face with dim, shifty eyes peering out restlessly between red, swollen lids, a face framed by mouse-coloured hair and surmounting a great, shapeless body clad in black alpaca.”

”Good! I see her,” said Pynsent.

”I was prepared to sympathise. She has some ailment, poor creature, a chronic dyspepsia and a grievance as chronic against destiny. One could pity her if she said and ate less. Her daughter admits that she would be a different woman if she kept on the muzzle. She calls herself a lady, and told me that she married beneath her. Dew, I fancy, was a petty tradesman. He left his widow this small property and a tiny income. Mary has a tremendous struggle to make ends meet means. She’s one in ten thousand.”

”Um!” said Pynsent. ”Don’t fall in love with your Honey Dew!”

”Don’t talk rot, Pynsent!” Mark replied sharply. Jim Corrance frowned at the painter, who realised at once that he had said something *mal-à-propos*.

”I shall cut a lettuce for you fellows,” said Mark.

As he left the shelter, Jim turned to Pynsent.

”You put your hoof into it,” he growled.

”I did,” said Pynsent.

”I say—is Mark going to take a front seat?”

”I don’t know.”

Mark came back carrying a bottle of Sauterne and a noble *Romaine*, which he handed to Pynsent, who was famous for his salads. Mary entered a minute later with a well-basted chicken and a great dish of peas. The trio fell to their luncheon with appetite. Mary added a tart, some excellent cheese, and the best of coffee.

”I’ve enjoyed myself immensely,” said Pynsent. ”You’re in Arcady, Mark. You ought to write an idyll here: Aucassin and Nicolete—hey?”

They moved up into the pine grove, talking about books and art. Jim Corrance listened, smoking his big cigar. Pynsent, who smoked Caporal cigarettes which he rolled himself, spoke volubly in a sharp New England twang:

”People prate about giving the world what the world wants. An artist gives what’s in him to give. I say that nothing else is possible, whether the world likes it or whether it doesn’t. And, luckily, the world that buys pictures and books is catholic in its tastes. All the same, just at present there is a big demand for stuff which is signed. You know what I mean. The crowd clamours for individuality. I was standing in front of a picture of mine at the Academy last year, and a cleverish-looking girl said: ’That’s a Pynsent. I like his work because I always know it, not because I understand it.’ I nearly asked her to shake hands. It’s the same with books. There’s an immense quantity of well-written, interesting novels published every year, but you’ll find that the few which sell are stamped on every page with the author’s name. The brand does it, first and last.”

”I only read books that amuse me,” said Jim.

”You’re a man. Men read books sometimes, but women buy them. Let’s hope that Mark’s stuff will please the women. Then he will arrive.”

While they were talking, a young man passed through the gate and up the garden to the cottage door.

”Hullo! Who’s this?” said Pynsent.

Mary answered the question by coming out of the house in a becoming frock and hat and joining the young man. Together they strolled down the path. The three men stared at each other. It had not occurred to any of them that Mary might have a young man. And this particular one seemed to be the typical young man, always seen of a Sunday arm-in-arm with a pretty girl: commonplace, smug, self-assured. While they looked Mrs. Dew’s thin querulous voice filtered through the sunlit space of the garden—

”Mary, Mary—don’t be away too long!”

Mary’s fresh voice came from behind the palings—

”Of course not, mother. I shall be back to make your tea at four.”

”Our Jill has her Jack,” said Pynsent. ”That was a becoming hat.”

”She made it herself,” Mark observed.

”Then she likes her Jack. Such a girl would not prink to please a man to whom she was indifferent.”

Jim Corrance thrust out his big jaw. ”Mary may have made that hat to please herself. If I’d her face, by gad, I’d make just such a hat and enjoy myself with a looking-glass.”

”So would I,” said Mark.

Pynsent and Jim returned to town before dinner. They promised to come again, and often, but Mark guessed that such promises were written in ink, blue and variable as a May sky. He expected to be much alone, and during the months that followed was not disappointed. From his friends at the Mission he held aloof. He knew they would ask questions, deeming it a duty to argue and reprove.

Mark had written the truth to David Ross after the night on Ben Caryll. In reply, David wisely made no protest against Mark's determination to leave the Church. That he would speak in due time Mark was uncomfortably aware, and he learned—not without a feeling of relief—that his old chief was the busiest man in Poplar.

May passed quickly, devoid of incident and accident. Towards the end of it, however, Mark, reading his morning paper, was horrified to learn that Bagshot, the man he had tried to reclaim, had murdered his wife in a drunken fit. He hastened to London, saw the prisoner—an abject, cowering wreck of what he had been—and listened to his dreadful story. The poor fellow had struggled hard against the craving for drink, yet in the end he had slain the woman he loved. It was heartrending—the triumph of evil over good.

After seeing Bagshot, Mark reread that battered memorandum-book which he had carried through terrible slums. Once more, the appeal of the friendless and helpless stirred him profoundly. Very stealthily, like "humble Allen," he began to revisit some of his waifs; most of them had disappeared; others as wretched and forlorn occupied their place. But his ministrations—necessarily ill-sustained and intermittent—appeared ineffectual. The joyous confidence of former days had departed. The squalor seemed invincible, the forces against which he contended so vast and ungovernable that sense and sensibility revolted. Only faith could remove such mountains, and faith had forsaken Mark Samphire. None the less, he persevered.

About the end of June Archibald and his wife came back from France and settled down in Cadogan Place. Archibald asked Mark to meet them in a long letter, full of a description of Chenonçeau. At the end was a postscript in Betty's handwriting: "*Please come.*" Mark obeyed—a prey to feelings which cannot be set down. For six weeks he had seen Betty's face looking out of the window of the train, white, piteous, despairing. But when they met he was amazed to find her rosy and smiling, full of plans, in high health and spirits. Then he remembered that his own health was excellent. Archibald made him welcome, entreated his advice about the arrangement of books and engravings, begged him to hang his hat on his own peg, and alluded only vaguely to the red tie.

"You will come back to us," he said confidently.

Betty held his hand tight at parting. "Don't slip out of our lives!" she whispered.

Mark had a glimpse of the face seen from the train, and hardly knew to what he was pledging himself when he stammered: "N-n-no, n-n-no—c-c-certainly not."

After this first meeting it became easy to drop in to luncheon or tea. The novel was under revision, and several passages describing certain streets and

localities had to be rewritten. Mark had the artist's passion for truth, carried possibly to excess. One of his characters was a shopgirl who worked in Edgware Road. Mark spent three days in Edgware Road, notebook in hand, greedily absorbing the light and colour of the great thoroughfare. But he made a point of returning to Weybridge each night and slept, whenever it was fine, in the grove, lulled to sleep by the pines.

Curiosity took him to St. Anne's in Sloane Street, when Archibald preached his first sermon. It was crowded with a fashionable congregation, some of whom came to hear the music—as fine as could be found in London outside the cathedrals; others, no doubt, were attracted by a new and eloquent preacher; the rest attended divine service in their parish church, and would have been in their places, cheered and sustained by the reflection that they were doing their duty, if the rector had had no palate to his mouth and the choir had been composed of village boys squalling free of charge to the accompaniment of a harmonium. Mark sat in the gallery, whence he could see Betty occupying a pew not far from the pulpit. He wondered what sort of sermon Archibald would preach. And he wondered also how it would affect Betty. Meantime, he examined the congregation. All these fine folk were possessed of substantial incomes. The struggle for daily bread was an experience unknown to them. The men seemed to be fathers of families for the most part, portly squires of ripe, rosy countenances, many-acred, and duly sensible of the position and station in life to which it had pleased God to call them. They put gold into the offertory bag, and could be counted upon to subscribe handsomely to parochial charities. In striking contrast were the brothers and lovers of the beautifully gowned women beside them. All, to a man, were frock-coated, patent-leather-booted, exquisitely cravatted—gilded youths, indifferent to music or sermon, worshippers in form only, because "it pleases the mater, you know," or "Dolly expects it," or "I must make myself solid with Aunt Sarah." Mark noted their well-cut, impassive features, their resigned air, and their contemptuous negligence of the responses. The women, on the other hand, displayed a certain ardour of devotion tempered by a lively interest in their neighbours' clothes. A few prayed long and fervently, giving themselves up to the emotions inspired by the lovely music and splendid ritual; the many were intermittent in their attention. It was plain that a girl just below Mark, who sang delightfully, was distracted from thoughts of heaven by the difficulty of determining whether the cape of a friend across the aisle was trimmed with sable or mere mink. But what struck Mark more forcibly than anything else was an expression common to all the faces when in repose. While the lessons were being read, men and women alike suffered their features to relax into a normal look of discontent. Mouths dropped; heavy lids veiled tired eyes; dismal lines appeared upon fair faces.

When Archibald ascended the pulpit, a thrill vibrated through his congregation. Mark perceived at a glance that the Rector of St. Anne's had secured the goodwill and enthusiasm of the women. They stared at his fine head, their eyes suffused and shining, their lips slightly parted, a-quiver with anticipation.

"*Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*"

After a moment's pause, Archibald repeated the text with a different inflection. Then, leaning forward, speaking without notes, he began his sermon. Mark noted certain mannerisms common to many preachers. Archibald hoped that his brothers and sisters in Christ would bear with him while he laid before them a few thoughts. The thoughts appealed emotionally to a congregation who had consecrated their energies and potentialities to the art of living. To such, death, especially a painful death, is horror. The preacher pictured the last hours of the righteous man, the faithful servant, conscious that his task has been accomplished in this world, and that in the next a place is awaiting him, where, under freer, fuller conditions, he may still carry on the Master's work. Then, changing his tone, Archibald portrayed the death-bed of the evil-liver—hopeless, faithless, God-forsaken!

The sermon made an impression. As the congregation streamed out of church into the sunshine, Mark caught words, phrases, ejaculations which showed plainly that the new rector had at least satisfied expectation. But Mark told himself the fringe of a great subject had been touched—and no more. Archibald's manner almost suggested the detestable adjective—melodramatic. His power was that of an actor rather than an evangelist. Above and beyond Mark's recognition of this was the certainty that Betty recognised it also, albeit, possibly, not so clearly. Mark had kept his eyes on Betty's face. More than once some subtile inflection of the preacher's voice had thrilled her; but towards the end of the sermon her attention and interest had waned. Instinctively Mark groped his way to the conclusion that if Archibald had gained his wife's love and esteem by the use of another's brain, he might find it difficult to hold by the strength of his own.

CHAPTER XXVII
IN GRUB STREET

Mark's short story had been duly printed and published in Conquest's magazine.

About the time of its appearance (midsummer) Mark called on Conquest, and the acquaintance then made ripened into a sort of intimacy. Conquest, quick to perceive that Mark had "stuff" in him, and learning that Mark was writing a novel, expressed a wish to read it in typescript.

"I advised you, you remember, to write a novel and burn it."

"I have done so," said Mark quietly.

A big, burly man, with a rugged, leonine head, Conquest liked to be told he resembled Landor. With this robust physique went a singularly feminine apprehension and appreciation of details. The enormous amount of work he could accomplish, his grasp of technicalities, his knowledge, amounting to intuition, of what the public wanted, his power of attracting and dominating young men of talent, and, above all, his encyclopædic memory, made him invaluable to the firm who employed him.

Mark submitted his novel. Conquest read it, and sent for the author. Mark found him in the editorial chair, surrounded by books, papers, manuscripts, press-clippings innumerable—a chaos out of which the master alone could evoke order. In the room beyond, two type-writing machines were clicking savagely. Here Conquest's "sub," a secretary, and half a dozen myrmidons were hard at work. The "sub" and his assistants looked pale and thin; Conquest alone seemed to thrive and expand in an atmosphere impregnated with the odour of tobacco-smoke, damp paper, and printers' ink.

"Sit down! And listen to the words of the ancient! This is the place where I do the talking. When I stop, you must go. *Shall the Strong retain the Spoil?* is d——d good and—don't look so pleased!—d——d bad. There's hope for you. We'll publish if you like to pay half the printer's bill. Mind you, the book has but a ghost's chance of catching on; but I don't want it altered. You'd cut out the best stuff and leave the trash. *I* red-pencilled your short story, but I can't afford the time to prune this—and you wouldn't like it. Leave it here, and I'll send you our regular agreement to look over and sign. You are under no obligations, remember, to publish with us. Good morning. Dine with me next Tuesday. Eight sharp!"

Mark found himself walking down a steep flight of stairs, and heard Conquest's strident tones echoing after him. He could not remember that he had accepted the offer made to him, but he was sure that Conquest took such acceptance for granted.

When Tuesday came, he told Conquest that he had read and was willing to sign the agreement which had been sent him. Conquest nodded in an off-hand manner, and did not allude to the subject again. But he pressed upon Mark the expediency of joining "The Scribblers," a club newly organised, and likely to become a power. Mark consented, pleased and flattered that a celebrity should exhibit such interest in him. He was put up and elected the same week. Conquest

introduced him to half a dozen members, most of whom took an early opportunity of congratulating Mark upon his friendship with the great man.

”He’s a wonder,” said a popular author, ”but, mind you, he works for Wisden and Evercreech, and he’ll squeeze you like an orange, if you give him the chance.”

The others winked at each other, but said nothing. Tommy Greatorex, a small, pale man, with very bright dark eyes which redeemed his face from insignificance, began to talk loudly. Mark had watched him gnawing nervously at his nails when Conquest’s name was mentioned.

”Oh—these editors!” he exclaimed, shaking his fist. ”Wouldn’t I like to tell some of ’em what I think of ’em! Yes; there are exceptions—thank the Lord!—but Samphire will soon find out that most of ’em are pinchers. Six men in this room sling ink for a living. Is there one who can stand up and swear that he’s not been squeezed?” Not a man moved. ”You see—they sit tight. In this trade of ours the worker is not paid for his work when it’s done. He has to wait for his pennies, poor devil, although he may be starving. And often he isn’t paid at all. A paper goes to pot, or the special article he has been asked—asked, mind you—to write is pigeon-holed and doesn’t appear, or there is a change of management. Any recourse? Why, man, if you send one of ’em a lawyer’s letter, you may get your cheque by return of post, but never a line will you write for my gentleman again. Never more, as the raven said! One can’t afford to quarrel with ’em. And don’t they know it—don’t they know it, as they blandly turn the screw? Now, in America, with the big magazines, it’s different. You submit your stuff, and if it’s available a cheque comes along with the acceptance, and a good cheque too. Over here, a few writers, of course, dictate terms, but the many take what they get with a humble if not a grateful heart. If you’ve private means of your own, you’re all right, but if you have any idea of supporting yourself with the pen—why, God help you!—for the editors won’t.”

”Cool yourself with a whisky and soda,” said the popular author, touching the electric bell. ”Our profession,” he looked at Mark, ”is like all others, overcrowded, and editors and publishers carry on their business along business lines. I’ll admit that most authors are not fit to deal with them in a business way. They don’t like to haggle, and they don’t know how to haggle. Personally, I employ an agent.”

”That’s all right for you,” Tommy retorted, ”but an agent’s not much use unless there’s an established market for one’s wares. What’s this book of yours about, Samphire?”

”The East End,” said Mark.

”Um—the slums treated humorously?”

”I’ve tried to stick to the facts.”

”And you expect to sell ’em as fiction? Oh—you optimist!”

”A play’s the thing,” observed another scribbler. ”Write plays.”

”Any fool can write a play,” said the little man, very scornfully. ”I—*mot qui sous parle*—have written plays, but it takes a diplomatist to get them read and a genius to get them accepted.”

Mark returned to Weybridge rather despondent.

Immediately afterwards he received his first instalment of proofs from Wisden and Evercreech. Correcting these proved a painful pleasure. Conquest’s judgment coloured and discoloured every sheet. What was good—what was bad? For his life Mark was unable to criticise his own work. Some of the bits he had liked when he wrote them now seemed crude and trite. His dialogue, he decided, was fair, but the narrative lacked distinction. Before beginning another novel, he would study the best models in French and English. Meantime he would turn out a story or two. These were written, despatched to Conquest—and returned with a printed slip politely setting forth the editor’s regret that they were unavailable. When he met Conquest some ten days later, the great man vouchsafed a few words.

”Sorry to return your stuff. We shall publish the book in October. Have you thought of a subject for another? You seem to have gripped conditions in the East End. How about a novel in rather lighter vein dealing with the adventures and misadventures of a millionaire who has turned philanthropist and wants to spend his pile in Stepney? Or—happy thought!—make your millionaire a millionairess—a good-looking spinster paddling her canoe through the slums. That would be capital. What do you say?”

”I’ll think about it,” said Mark hesitatingly. ”I’m awfully obliged to you, Conquest.”

”That’s all right. By the way, I can use an article on your brother, two thousand words. Make it very personal, and secure good photographs of him and his church.”

”But he mightn’t like it, you know.”

Conquest roared. ”I say—that’s immense—immense! Not like it? A popular preacher! Ha—ha—ha! Why, it’s incense to ’em, man alive. Ask him, at any rate. If he doesn’t jump, call me fool. Can you see him at once?”

”If you wish it.”

Somehow, to Mark’s disgust, Archibald did jump. The article appeared in a Church paper and led to an incident of much greater importance. Conquest wired to Mark to come up to town on business. Mark was given a capital luncheon at Dieudonne’s restaurant, but not till the coffee was served did Conquest speak of the matter in hand.

”I suppose you know,” he said carelessly, but keeping his eyes on Mark’s, ”that I pull many strings. Now this is between ourselves, in—the—strictest—

confidence. I want to pump you. Bless you, it always pays to be frank. How do I stand with your brother? Does he like me?"

"I'm sure he does," said Mark warmly. At Conquest's desire he had introduced him to Archibald. Conquest had dined in Cadogan Place.

"I can help him—materially. Of course there's something in it for me, but there's more in it for him, and I thought that you might be willing to act as a go-between. Have you noticed a big Basilica which Lord Vauxhall is building in that part of Chelsea where his new houses are? You have? A fine thing—hey? Oh, you don't admire the Byzantine style. Well, that church is the biggest advertisement in London. Shush-h-h! I don't want to be misunderstood. Vauxhall, who is a friend of mine, understands the value of churches. And he's a Churchman, too. He felt it to be his duty to build that church, and *I* say, not he, that it's a thundering big 'ad' for the neighbourhood. Now Vauxhall is immensely struck by your brother's eloquence. Vauxhall always wants the best of everything, and he pays for it, cash on the nail. He would like to offer the Basilica and fifteen hundred a year to your brother. Now the cat's out of the bag. What d'you think of her?"

Mark flushed. Conquest was his host.

"I think she's mangy."

"Good," said Conquest, in no way perturbed. "I wanted an honest opinion."

"As I understand this," said Mark, "Lord Vauxhall offers my brother a bribe to boom his new neighbourhood."

Conquest shrugged his mighty shoulders.

"You are a young man," he said drily. "Beware of hasty judgments. It's my experience that motives are generally mixed. Vauxhall has built and endowed a magnificent church. He offers it to your brother, or rather he empowers me to offer it, if there is a likelihood of the offer being accepted. Perhaps I had better speak to your brother myself."

"I should prefer that," said Mark.

When he saw Archibald, some days later, he was quite sure, from his knowledge of Conquest, that the matter had been broached, but Archibald said nothing to him about it. Betty, however, talked as if no change was impending, so Mark inferred that she was either without her husband's confidence or that Lord Vauxhall's offer had been refused. Betty was full of plans connected with the parish, and busy organising a large charity concert. Jim Corrance told Mark that he (Jim) had misread Betty's character and temperament.

"She's happy with her husband," he declared. "He has a way with him—women can't resist parsons when they're good and good-looking. One must concede that Archie is both."

Mark said nothing. He was quite unable to determine whether Betty had

found happiness or not. Sometimes, when alone with husband and wife, he marked an irritability not without significance. Archibald had acquired, since he came to London, a certain air and deportment common to many successful men. Betty chaffed him, called him "Sir Oracle," and when he protested against these quips, she would frown and bite her lip. Archibald was very particular about the antecedents of the people invited to his house. Some of Betty's acquaintances were banned. Lady Randolph had a word to say on this.

"Archie is quite right, my dear. He's not going to imperil his preferment by hobnobbing with such frisky folk. It pays to be exclusive. Look at those Bertheim women! They were—well, we know what they were; but when they married rich men, they refused to entertain any matron who was not immaculate. Now, to be seen at their houses is a patent of virtue!"

"Archie," said Betty, "is governed by the highest motives; still, I should like to see this house open to a few nice sinners: painters, writers, musicians; but Archie says they are all freethinkers or Laodiceans. It is a great grief to him that Mark gave up his Orders. He offered to take him as secretary."

Lady Randolph stared. There were times when she felt that Betty was an unknown quantity.

"You allowed him to make that offer?"

Betty turned aside her eyes. "I did not know that it was made. Of course Mark refused—would have done so in any case. I mention it to show you what manner of man Archie is. I don't think you do him justice. You spoke just now as if he were a time-server. His whole life is devoted to others."

"Does he—*know*?" said Lady Randolph, alluding to what had passed at Birr Wood.

"Why should I tell him?"

"Why, indeed, my dear?"

"It would distress him infinitely. And it might lead to a breach between the brothers. Mark comes here. He has changed greatly. I don't think that anything interests him very much except his literary work."

"He looks a different man," said Lady Randolph absently.

"If it had not been for that breakdown in those horrible slums, if——" Betty bit her lip. Lady Randolph pretended that she had noticed nothing unusual, but when she said good-bye she kissed Betty twice and whispered: "If I were you I should not encourage Mark to come here."

"*Encourage* him?"

"If he needs no encouragement—so much the worse."

Betty laughed nervously. Mark's companionship was a pleasure she would not forego. She was interested in his book; she liked to hear his talk, his gossip of Grub Street; his descriptions of the Dews, mother and daughter; his adventures

in search of material. Behind this lay the comfortable assurance that she had adjusted a difficult situation. She had lost the lover of her youth, but she had gained a good husband, a brother, and a friend. So she told herself that she was rich, repeating the phrase, till she came to believe it true. One day she said to Mark, "I suppose you would call me a rich woman, using the adjective in its widest sense."

"We are all rich—and poor," Mark replied evasively. "What rich man is not poor in some respect; what poor man is not rich in another? This is an age of classification. We go about sticking labels on to our friends and ourselves. If you honestly think yourself rich, you are so."

Sometimes he wondered if she could measure the violence of feeling which had driven him from the Church. She never spoke of his change of cloth; still she eyed his red tie askance. Archibald had said something when he came back from his honeymoon.

"At King's Charteris you could keep a curate. The pater said that he had spoken to you. And it's the family living."

"I'll say to you what I didn't like to say to the pater: 'Drop it.'"

"Certainly," Archibald replied. "But it's a pity your powers of organisation should be wasted." Then he made the offer which had provoked astonishment in Lady Randolph. It astonished Mark also, revealing as it did his brother's lack of insight where he (Mark) was concerned.

"You could help me enormously," Archibald concluded.

"I am going to help myself," said Mark.

Just before the novel was published, Archibald let fall a hint that Conquest had spoken to him. Betty happened to be present, but Archibald addressed himself to Mark.

"Have you ever met Lord Vauxhall?"

"No."

"A very charming man—and a Christian. He dines here next week. I should like you to meet him. By the way, he's a friend of Conquest."

"Ah!" said Mark.

"I like Conquest immensely," said Archibald suavely. "He has the larger vision."

"Betty—do you like Conquest?" said Mark abruptly.

She answered promptly: "No."

"Why not?" her husband inquired.

"He's an Octopus man, with his tentacles waving in every direction. And his mind is like a big room handsomely furnished, but without a fireplace in it. Certainly—he's been sweet as Hybla honey to me, and I ought to like him, but I

don't."

CHAPTER XXVIII
A SUNDAY IN CADOGAN PLACE

In late October, when pages fall as thickly from printing-presses as leaves do from trees, *Shall the Strong retain the Spoil?* appeared. During the preceding Spring many of the best publishers had withheld books which were now offered to the public. Conquest predicted a glutted market, and no sales for wares bearing obscure brands. Mark, he said, might compass a *succès d'estime*—nothing more. He added that the time had come to pull strings, if strings were to be pulled.

"I don't quite understand," said Mark.

"Get so-and-so," he named a popular author, "to enlighten you. Look here, Samphire, you're a man of good family, your people know numbers of swells, that brother of yours is hand in glove with some bigwigs. Stir 'em up with a long pole. I don't suppose you care to fork out for such advertising as our friend I mentioned uses. Paragraphs and all that."

"He pays for paragraphs?"

"Directly and indirectly—you innocent! I see you are disgusted. That's all right. I mentioned the matter, because I could steer you a bit, if you wished to spend say—fifty pounds. We shall advertise the book, of course, in the regular way. It's the irregular way, my boy, which brings in the dollars."

"The book must sell on its merits," said Mark.

"As you please," said Conquest.

Shortly afterwards, the first notices were sent to him by the Press Clipping Agency to which he had become a subscriber. Mark was told that his work showed extraordinary promise, that he would take high rank, when he had found himself, that he was a master of dialogue and dialect, the author of a powerful and convincing study of conditions which challenged the attention of every thinking man and woman, and so on and so forth. He rushed up to town, showed the clippings to Betty, who seemed to be more excited and pleased than he was himself, went on to Wisden and Evercreech, and thence to his club, where he found Tommy Greatorex, whiter and more nervous than usual, sitting alone by the fire in the library. To him the clippings were presently submitted with an apology. Tommy took them with an ironical smile.

”They’re always kind to a new man if he shows any ability.” He glanced at the clippings, flipping them with his lean delicately shaped fingers. ”You are subtle, I see, and daring, and brilliant—and strong! By Jove, Samphire, I’ll bet a new umbrella, which I want badly, that you didn’t know you were such a ring-tailed squealer—hey? Don’t blush, my dear fellow. Wait till your stuff sells, and then read what they’ll say about it. Ha—ha! Listen to this! One of ’em says: ’Mr. Samphire is evidently at home in some of the sordid scenes which he describes with such power and pathos; we take it that he has spent many years in the slums.’ So far—so good. It’s more than likely that the fellow who wrote that is a member of this club and in the know. Here’s another, next to it, egad! ’This story reveals imaginative powers of a high order, for it is plain that the author has never set foot in Stepney....’ Ha—ha—ha! Now sit down, stand me a drink, and tell me how many copies have been sold.”

”A hundred copies were sold the day before yesterday,” said Mark.

”Now, that’s a little bit of all right, and no mistake. I’m delighted to hear it. I congratulate you—*con fuoco*! That means business. One—hundred—copies in *one* day! Whew-w-w! Hang it, why don’t you rejoice?”

”Because,” said Mark, ”I found out that the hundred copies were bought by one man for one man. A friend of mine on the Stock Exchange took the lot. The book is not selling.”

”Sorry,” said Tommy quietly. ”I’ve read it. I’ve reviewed it. This,” he tapped one of the clippings which he still held in his hand, ”is mine. I got for it a few shillings, already spent, and the book which I shall keep, because it is written by a good fellow. It’s not what’s in the book which appeals to me, but what’s in the writer, and which will come out—some day.”

”Thank you,” said Mark.

He returned to luncheon at Cadogan Place, humbled, and therefore, in a woman’s eyes, meet for sympathy and encouragement.

”In any case,” said Betty, ”you have had the delight of writing the book. And it *is* strong and subtle; but, Mark, few people are interested in slums. Your book made me cry, and I want to laugh. Life is so sad, why make it sadder?”

Mark had listened to interminable arguments upon this vexed question. But in Betty’s tone and manner he caught a glimpse of a spectre.

”Your life is not sad,” he said.

”I’m one of the lucky ones,” she replied hastily ”We were speaking of your book.”

”Hang the book,” said Mark impatiently ”What is that to me in comparison with——” He stopped abruptly, got up from his chair, paced the length of the room, and came back.

”You are happy—are you not?” he asked. They were alone in the drawing-

room, filled with the pictures and china which had come out of the saloon at The Whim. Archibald was presiding over one of his innumerable committees. Looking at Betty as she sat amongst things familiar to Mark from childhood, it was difficult to believe that she was a married woman. She still retained a bloom of maidenhood, a daintiness and freshness. Her face suggested the nymph rather than the matron.

"Of course I am happy," she replied; then she added in a whisper: "Mark, I ought to be happy, but I am a rebel."

"All women are rebels, Betty. Against what in particular do you rebel?"

"I oughtn't to tell you, but—but I must. I suppose I am the many-sided woman, who ought to have half a dozen husbands. I am interested in so many things. I like to browse here and there. But Archie doesn't care about anything or anybody outside his own vineyard. He is going up and up and I am—falling! Oh, I'm disloyal, but I must speak. It comes to this: Archie loves me and of course I love him, but we—we have nothing to say to each other when we're alone."

She sat, twisting her fingers, staring forlornly at the carpet. Mark burst into speech. At the sound of his voice, still so youthful in quality, she raised her head, smiling, eager, intent.

"Why, Betty, we all get blue at times, and sigh for what we've not got. There are women, no doubt, who are fatly content with their lives, but I don't suppose they go up or down. One pictures them in one spot, doing the same stupid thing, saying the same stupid thing for ever and ever. I think you're in a healthy state. When we feel that we are going down, we begin to beat our wings and flap upwards. Some saints, possibly, might be justified in taking a rest-cure; they are the ones who never do it."

He rose to go, not daring to stay.

"When are you coming again, Mark? You always do me good. Can't you spend next Sunday with us? By the way, have you ever been to our church?"

"Yes; the first Sunday Archibald preached."

"Oh! The sermon about Balaam."

"Yes."

"You know, he says that he's uneven. But the women in this parish think him wonderful. Some of them, who sit near the pulpit, make a point of crying whenever he gives them a chance. One told me that when he pronounced the Benediction she felt purged of all sin! I could have bitten her."

Mark promised to spend the following Sunday in Cadogan Place, and duly accompanied Betty to morning service. For nearly thirty minutes Archibald preached to a crowded congregation, who listened intently to a conventional theme, treated conventionally. Coming out Mark heard a tall, thin man, with a striking face, whisper to the woman beside him: "I came for bread; he gave us

pap—in a golden spoon."

"Did you hear that?" said Betty, a moment later.

"Yes."

Some friends greeted Betty, and no more was said till luncheon, to which the Chrysostom of Sloane Street applied himself, as usual, seriously and silently. He looked slightly puffy and his eyes were losing their clearness and sparkle. Mark asked abruptly if he were overworked.

"Every minute is filled," said Archibald heavily. "Overworked? I can stand a lot of work."

"He would be miserable without it—and bored," said Betty. "He won't even come to concerts with me now."

"It's the work that tells, nowadays, my dear. Preaching gives a man a start, but it's the steady strain of parochial organisation which brings one to the top of the hill."

"You are neglecting your sermons," said Betty. "For several Sundays they have struck me as being—how shall I put it—uninspired. They hold one's attention, yes, but they do not grip; they touch, but they do not penetrate."

Archibald nodded, frowning and crumbling the bread beside his plate.

"The Duchess," he said, "stopped me this morning after church to tell me that she liked the treatment of my text immensely."

"Oh—the Duchess!" exclaimed Betty.

"I've so much on my mind," said Archibald, turning to Mark. He rose, looking at his watch. "I must go now to hear a man sing in Upper Tooting. The cigars are in my room."

He went out. As the door shut behind him, Betty turned a contrite face to Mark's.

"I hit him when he was down. What a beast I am!"

At that moment it became a conviction to Mark that Betty loved an ideal husband, who would fall from the pinnacle on which she had perched him. A feeling of pleasure at this impending catastrophe almost turned him sick. Then, very slowly, he resolved that the powers within him should be devoted to the preservation of an ideal, so vital to the welfare of the woman he loved. Betty began to speak of his literary work.

"When I read your book," she said, "I had an intuition that one day you would write a play."

Mark quoted Tommy Greatorex. "That's an easy job."

"I have a motif for you. The emotional treatment of religion. Look at the success of this new book, *Robert Elsmere*! The same success awaits the dramatist who can use like material. I should make the principal character a woman of passion with a strong sense of religion."

"A sinner?"

"Yes. It seems to me that sinners on the stage have great opportunities. The world must listen to what they have to say. In real life the good people do all the talking, the moral talking, I mean; an honest sinner holds his or her tongue. It's such a pity, for I'm sure your honest sinner loathes his sin. In my drama the sinner is saved, because the sense of what she has suffered, her personal experience of the horror and misery of sin, make for her salvation."

"The right man could do something with it, no doubt."

"Why not you, Mark?"

He fell into a reverie, staring into the fire. Betty perceived that he had wandered out of the world of speech into the suburbs of silence, where visions of what might have been come and go. Presently he said abruptly:

"Shall we walk?"

"There's an east wind blowing, evil for man and beast."

"You're neither. Come on."

They crossed the park, skirting the Serpentine, a dull, leaden-coloured lake wrinkled by the keen wind. On some of the benches sweethearts were sitting, serenely unmindful of the blast.

"They feel warm enough," said Betty, laughing. "Well, I'm in a glow, too."

When they returned to Cadogan Place, Archibald had just arrived from Upper Tooting. He said that he had found a superb tenor, whom he had engaged.

"He sang 'Nazareth'—quite admirably."

Betty, teapot in hand, looked up, interested at once.

"Oh, Archie, you have not sung 'Nazareth' for months. Do sing it after tea!"

"Do!" Mark added. "I haven't heard you sing for a year."

Finally, after a little pressing, Archibald seated himself at the piano, a beautiful Steinway. As he touched the keys, Betty's face assumed the expression of delighted receptivity so familiar to Mark. She glanced at the singer between half-closed eyes, lying back in her chair in an attitude of physical and mental ease. One hand drooped at her side, and as Archibald sang the fingers of this hand contracted and relaxed, keeping time to the rhythm of the song. Mark felt that her pulses were throbbing, quivering with delight and satisfaction. The music touched him also, stirring to determination his desire to help and protect the woman he loved. But when his thoughts turned, as they did immediately, to Archibald, they became of another texture and complexion. He had not prayed to God since that night on Ben Caryll. Now, beneath the spell of the music, he repeated to himself: "Oh God, take this hate from me; take this hate from me!"

When Archibald stopped singing, he said that he must go to his study for an hour's work before evening service. Mark accompanied him. As soon as they were alone, he blurted out what was in his mind.

”I say, Archie, if you want a little help, I’m your man. I suppose work means the preparation of your Advent sermons. I helped you last year. Shall I help you this?”

Archibald’s face flushed.

”I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” he muttered; ”but ideas don’t flow. If you would help—but, but you have your own work.”

”My work! Well, it’s lucky I’ve an allowance, or I should certainly starve. Archie, I’d like to help you. I ask it as a favour. Come on; what’s the use of jawing? What’s it to be this Advent? I thought of something in church this morning which you might lick into shape.”

He filled his pipe, talking in his hesitating yet voluble way. Archibald, the practical, took a pad to jot down notes in shorthand. Mark began to pace the room as his ideas flowed faster. It seemed to him that he had dammed them up for many months; now they came down like the Crask after a big rain, a cleansing flood, carrying away all refuse, all barriers. When he had finished, Archibald arose ponderously and shook his hand.

”You’re a wonderful fellow,” he said slowly; ”the hare you, the tortoise I. It was always so.”

”The tortoise won the r-r-race,” said Mark.

When he went to bed that night he flung open wide the window of his room. Outside, the night was inky black and tempestuous. Not a star to be seen above, and the lamps below burning dimly, throwing pale circles of light upon the wet, muddy street. Mark stood inhaling the fresh air, drawing long and deep breaths, saturating himself with it. Presently he muttered:

”I may be happy yet.”

CHAPTER XXIX
THE PROCESSION OF LIFE

Late in May Betty was expecting to be confined; and Mark could see that Archibald tried in vain to conceal his anxiety. ”One never knows how these affairs will end,” he said a score of times to his brother, who replied, ”Betty is strong; she will do well; you are foolish to borrow trouble.” None the less, Mark’s anxiety quickened also as the time approached, becoming the more poignant, possibly, because the birth of this baby emphasised his own isolation and loneliness.

Betty as mother—and he felt sure that she would prove an admirable mother—appeared indescribably remote. Archibald as father, babbling already about his *son*, obstructed the horizon.

"The boy may reign at Pitt Hall," said Archibald. "George has written to say that he hopes it will be an heir—*his* word—because then he will feel at liberty to remain a bachelor. Do you think that Betty is as prudent as she ought to be?"

"She will do well, she will do well," Mark reiterated.

"You will come to us, Mark. I shall want you, you know."

"If you insist——"

"I don't think I could face it without you."

Betty added her entreaties. "I'm not afraid," she maintained; "but Archie is behaving like an old woman. Lady Randolph will be with me; I should feel easier if you were with Archie. How devoted you brothers are to each other!"

Mark hastily put up his hand to cover a smile which he felt to be derisive. Then he muttered awkwardly, "All right, I'll c-c-come."

Again he wondered whether she had suspected the hatred within him. Surely a creature of her intuitions and sympathies must know. And if she did know, and, knowing, faced the facts, trying to adjust the balance, piecing together the fragments of broken lives, was it not his duty, however painful, to help her and the man she had married? And perhaps she had foreseen that any peril threatening an object dear to both brothers might serve to unite them. The woman who had whirled them asunder must cherish the hope that she alone could bring them together.

When the hour came, when he was alone with Archibald at midnight, straining his ears for that thin, querulous wail of the newly born, he forgot everything except that Betty might be taken away. The doctor bustled in from time to time, cheery and sanguine at first, but as the hours passed betraying uneasiness and anxiety. Towards morning, when the whole world seemed to have grown chill and dreary, he asked for a consultation; and a servant was sent hot-foot for the most famous accoucheur in Harley Street.

Archibald rushed upstairs. He crawled down them a few minutes later, ghastly, trembling, the scarecrow of the prosperous Rector of St. Anne's. Mark, as white as he, seized his arm.

"Well, well, how is she? That fool of a doctor has exaggerated. They always make out everything to be more serious than it is."

"She is going, she is going," the husband muttered.

Mark shook him violently.

"Archie, you must pull yourself together. Do you hear?"

"It's a judgment, a judgment."

"What do you say?"

"I never told her about those two sermons. I'm a coward, a coward. You despise me—I have felt it."

The big fellow had collapsed, shrunk incredibly, depleted of windy self-assurance and vanity. Mark's hate and scorn and envy began to ooze from him as the old love, the virile instinct of the strong to comfort and protect the weak, gushed into his heart, suffusing a genial warmth through every fibre of his being.

"I gave them to you freely," he said. "I urged you to preach that first sermon. Put what is past from you."

But Archibald shook his head. Now that the silence was broken, he wished to speak, to give his shame and trouble all the words so long suppressed. In a pitiful manner he began a self-indictment—*qui s'accuse s'excuse.*

"If Betty is spared, I shall tell her the truth," he concluded.

Mark frowned, trying to measure the effect of such a belated confession on Betty. Then he heard his brother saying in the tone of conviction which so impressed his congregations, "Of course, Betty did not marry me because I preached those sermons."

Mark started. Temptation beset him to answer swiftly: "She did—she did. I know she did. Had it not been for my words in your mouth, she would have waited for, she would have married—me."

He turned aside his face, twisted and seamed by the effort of holding his tongue. Archibald continued: "It has been a secret sore. I thought hard work—I have worked very hard—would heal it. If—if she is spared, I shall speak for all our sakes."

Mark's voice was quite steady when he replied, "For all our sakes. You take me into account?"

"Why, of course. Don't you remember? You wished her to know. You said you would tell her. Why didn't you?"

"Why, indeed?" Mark echoed fiercely. Then, with a sudden change of manner, he went on: "You must do what you think best. Betty has placed you on a pinnacle. See that you don't topple over! Practise what you preach. Then you will save her soul and your own."

"We talk as if she were not dying."

"She will not die," said Mark solemnly. At that moment he was sure that Betty would live, must live, because (and the reason illumines the dark places through which Mark had passed), because it would be so much better for her if she died.

Just then the consulting surgeon arrived. Archibald took him upstairs, and returned to Mark within a quarter of an hour, saying that the case was even more serious than had been supposed.

"Drax sentenced me to death," said Mark, "but I'm alive and strong."

Archibald fell on his knees in an agony of supplication. Mark watched him. Suddenly the husband looked up.

"In the name of God, pray," he entreated. "You are a better man than I—pray!"

But Mark remained standing.

He desired to pray, but above this desire and dominating it was the vivid horror of that evil spirit, which had so lately fled and which might come back. A sense of unworthiness prostrated his spirit, but not his body. He glanced at Archibald, and left the room.

Outside, the gas in the hall and passages seemed to be struggling helplessly against the light of breaking day. Familiar objects—furniture belonging to the Admiral—loomed large out of a sickly, yellow mist. Mark found himself staring blankly at an ancient clock ticking with loud and exasperating monotony. It had so ticked away the seconds, the minutes, the hours of more than a hundred years!

The next objects that caught his eye were two umbrellas. They stood side by side, curiously contrasted: the one a dainty trifle of violet silk and crystal, encircled with a gold band; and the other large and massive with a symbolic shepherd's crook as a handle. These arrested Mark's attention. He remembered that he had chaffed Betty about her umbrella, telling her that it was too smart for a parson's wife, and absurdly frail as a protection against anything save a passing shower. She retorted that a wise woman never braves a storm, and then she had said with the smile he knew so well: "My umbrella, which, after all, is an *en tout cas*, is just like me: made for sunshine rather than rain."

He sat down, waiting, staring at Betty's umbrella. When he looked up Lady Randolph was coming down the stairs very slowly—a white-haired old woman. Something in her face choked the question which fluttered to his lips. To gain an instant's time, he opened the library door and called to his brother—

"Archie!"

Archibald appeared instantly.

"A girl has been born," said Lady Randolph, "but she is dead."

"Dead?" repeated Archibald.

"And Betty?" Mark demanded hoarsely.

"The doctors think she is safe."

The three passed into the dining-room, where some food had been laid out. Lady Randolph gave details in a worn voice. Betty's pluck had been amazing; she had displayed a fortitude lacking which she would probably have succumbed. The consulting surgeon, who entered shortly afterwards, assured the husband that, humanly speaking, the danger was over. Almost at once Archibald recovered his normal composure and dignified deportment. Mark, on the other hand, exhibited signs of collapse. He sat down shivering, as if he had been attacked by

malignant malaria.

Next day he saw Betty for a couple of minutes. She smiled and thanked him, intimating that Archibald had told her that the suspense would have been intolerable had not Mark helped him to bear it. Of the loss of her baby she said nothing, but before Mark left the room she exacted a promise that he would come to see her during the period of convalescence.

About this time he began his third novel, *The Songs of the Angels.* Conquest asked him if he were setting to work on the theme suggested by him, and when Mark pleaded inability to guide a young and beautiful heiress through the slums of Stepney, the great man shrugged his shoulders—a gesture now associated in Mark's mind with derision and contempt. Conquest then demanded what he was doing, and hearing the synopsis of the new story shrugged his vast shoulders once more.

"That won't sell," he said. "You could have handled my theme—if you had tried. By the way, that brother of yours has jumped at Vauxhall's offer. I knew he would. He'll go very far, that young man. Even the Basilica won't be big enough to hold him."

He laughed loudly and strode away.

During July Mark saw Betty regularly twice a week. Archibald was working harder than ever in and out of St. Anne's parish, but of the Basilica, now nearing completion, not a word was said by either husband or wife. Mark wondered if Betty knew. Her recovery was slow and intermittent.

"Are you worried about anything?" Mark asked one day.

"Yes," she admitted, after a minute's hesitation; then she continued quickly, "Have you noticed another falling off in Archie's sermons?"

"He's unequal, of course," Mark replied. "And the best brains refuse to work in a tired body."

"I wish you'd say a word about that. He'd take anything from you."

Again she caught a glimpse of that derisive smile of Mark's which she could not interpret, as he promised to speak to his brother. Did he reap his reward when Betty said, three weeks later, "Archie has preached splendidly the last two Sundays. Has he told you that he has been commanded to preach again at Windsor?"

Mark nodded rather coldly, so Betty thought. He reflected that he was the man with one talent. How much better that it should be given to the man who had ten rather than be atrophied by disuse, buried, so to speak, in one upon whom silence was imposed. Every pang of envy which twisted his heart he tried to assuage with the anodyne of kind actions. But the faith which had never failed him when he was sick seemed to have forsaken him utterly now that he was

whole.

When *The Songs of the Angels* was half written, telegrams summoned Mark and his brothers to Pitt Hall, where the Squire lay dying, senseless and speechless. He had been seized with a fit, after returning from a long day's hunting on Christmas Eve. The doctors said at once that nothing could be done. Pitt Hall was hung with holly and mistletoe; and Mark, coming out of the room where his father lay dead, saw the servants pulling down the decorations. It seemed to him that the old house would never be the same again. It never was—to him.

The will revealed a terrible state of affairs. After the widow's jointure was paid, only enough money would be left to keep the estate out of the market. George, in any case, would have to let it for a term of years and economise closely, if he hoped to cancel the mortgages. Low prices, bad years, and a disastrous attempt to recover losses by speculation had almost wrecked one of the finest properties in Slowshire. The younger sons, as residuary legatees, found themselves absolutely unprovided for. This, it is true, made no difference to Archibald, but Mark told himself ruefully that he only possessed his books and simple furnishings and some ninety pounds. George was unable to do anything; but Archibald offered his brother the same allowance he had been in the habit of receiving. Mark refused it.

"I think I can pay my way," said Mark.

"I owe you that—and more too."

"Oh, rubbish!"

"If you would live with us, and become my paid secretary. You could have your afternoons and evenings free."

"I shall not leave my pines," said Mark. "Many thanks, but I'm going to score off my own bat."

This conversation took place upon the afternoon of the funeral. That evening, in the smoking-room, the question of the living again presented itself. George Samphire had inherited his father's manner and ideas, the latter tempered, possibly, by life in a cavalry regiment.

"By Jove!" said he, "there's King's Charteris for you, Mark. The rector, they tell me, won't see Easter. It's the very thing, and you can keep an eye on my tenant. That's settled, thank the Lord!"

An awkward pause followed. At his father's grave Mark had worn, and wore still, black clothes of clerical cut.

"I am a layman," said Mark.

"What? You've chucked it! But you can't—can he, Archie? Once a parson, always a parson. Archie can arrange anything."

”True,” said Archibald, ”but——” He glanced at Mark, who had risen.

”Don’t badger me, George,” Mark said quietly. ”You must find a better fellow than I for King’s Charteris. It’s been a terrible day. I’m off to bed.”

He marched out of the room, leaving George agape with astonishment.

”What the devil’s the meaning of this?” he asked of Archibald.

”I’m afraid he’s an agnostic.”

”Ag—wha-a-t!”

Archibald explained the meaning of the word, not so familiar then as now. George listened, frowning, interjecting many an ”Oh!” and ”Ah!” and ”By Jove!” as the speaker delicately conveyed the impression that he did not despair of leading this errant sheep back into the fold.

”Mark,” he concluded, ”has shown a great deal of right feeling, my dear George. I cannot doubt but that it will be well with him. But he is not one to be pressed.”

”That’s sound enough, old Slow-and-Sure, and I suppose we can get some fellow to keep King’s Charteris warm for him—eh? And they tell me you’ll have livings to give away one of these fine days. Good Lord! what a mess the poor governor has made of things!”

Saying this, the new squire of Pitt Hall sighed, poured himself out a whisky and soda, drank it, lit a candle, and went to bed, followed by Archibald.

Within the week Mark saw Conquest, by appointment, and told him what had happened, asking at the same time for a settlement of his small account. To his dismay he learned that he was in the debt of Wisden and Evercreech. What was due for his first short story and the illustrated interview with the Rector of St. Anne’s was swallowed up in the bill for printing the novel. Of this, not counting press copies, some three hundred and fifty had been sold, of which—as had been said—Jim Corrance bought one hundred outright.

”Our bill needn’t bother you,” said Conquest. ”And the novel may square it yet. You ask for my advice. Frankly, then, I say—journalism, but it’s uphill work. You’ve got to make a special study of editors—and what they want. The stuff which Jones prints and pays for, Smith, perhaps, won’t even take the trouble to return as unavailable.”

”Can you give me anything?”

”Nothing except advice, Samphire, and a letter or two. We are chock full. Of course I’ll always consider what you send me, but we have our regular staff, and fifty besides waiting to step into their shoes.”

”If I could get a sub-editorship?”

”Ask for the moon at once. You don’t know the ropes. Every fool thinks he can edit or sub-edit a paper, but the proprietors are not of their mind. You’re a clever fellow, Samphire, but you’ll pardon me for saying that you’re kinky, and

you seem to possess a vermiform appendix of a conscience. You can support yourself with your pen, when you know how to use it."

"I'm much obliged to you," said Mark humbly.

Conquest sent him half a dozen letters, which were presented in person. The editors, somehow, managed to convey the impression that they were obliging Conquest rather than the bearer of his credentials. Each promised, more or less courteously, to consider any work submitted. Tommy Greatorex, the pessimist, proved an unexpected source of sympathy and help. He learned that Mark spoke Italian. Together they explored Eyre Street Hill and the purlieus about Hatton Garden, an expedition which took concrete form in the shape of a paper dealing with the ice-cream vendors, the plaster-cast image sellers, and the like. Tommy sold the paper for twenty guineas, and divided the cheque with Mark. By chance Conquest learned of this, and wired for Mark.

"Greatorex says you talk Italian like a Dago. Would you care to translate an Italian novel for us? We'll pay you sixty pounds."

"Thank you very much," said Mark.

Conquest handed him the proof sheets of the novel.

"You must translate with discretion," he said carelessly; "but don't emasculate it! After all, we are not publishing for schoolgirls."

Mark left Paternoster Row, and mounted a 'bus in St. Paul's Churchyard. When he had taken his seat, he looked at the sheets and began to read them very rapidly. Tommy Greatorex was waiting for him at the Scribblers.

"Has Conquest given you Nespoli's novel?"

"It's in my pocket," said Mark, rather red in the face. "And it ought to be in the public sewer. I shan't translate it."

"Phew-w-w!" said Tommy. "What's the use of being so bally particular? What did he offer? Seventy-five? Oh, sixty—the Shylock. Well, old chap, if you don't take the job, somebody else will."

"There's not a particle of doubt about that," said Mark.

But when he returned the novel to Conquest, he saw that he had offended the great man, who shrugged his shoulders and said curtly that Mark had better buy a little lamb and play with it. This was too much. Mark flamed.

"I've stood your sneers long enough, Conquest," he said. "You've done me some good turns——"

"Hold on," said Conquest, black and grim. "Don't flatter yourself that I did them for you. You are the brother of Archibald Samphire, and that's about the only claim you have to *my* consideration. Now then—march!"

He pointed insolently to the door, towering above the slight figure confronting him. Mark recovered his temper.

"I'd hit you," he said politely, "if you were smaller, but I can't reach your

brazen face, you b-b-bully and b-b-blusterer. And I couldn't injure your thick skin with an axe."

The door between the sanctum and the room where the typewriters were clicking stood ajar. When Mark ended his sentence a sound of giggling was heard. Conquest, cursing, turned and kicked the door with violence. Mark laughed and disappeared, leaving an unscrupulous enemy behind him.

Misfortune, however, introduces us to friends as well as enemies. Mark had been hurt because Jim Corrance had not repeated his visit to Weybridge. Jim, he had said to himself, was cold, absorbed in money-getting, unmindful even of his mother, dear soul, who must often yearn for the companionship of her son. But when Jim heard of the Squire's will, he rushed down to Weybridge, taking with him an enormous hamper. Mark told Betty what passed.

"Jim arrived with a hamper. I believe he thought I was starving. He brought champagne, cigars, and every potted thing which grows in Fortnum and Mason's. And he told me that he was looking for a confidential clerk at five hundred a year. And would I do him the favour to take the billet. By Heaven—his face warmed my heart through and through."

"You look," said Betty, "as if someone had left you a fortune! Those potted things may come in handy, if you insist on refusing the help which your friends are only too glad to offer."

"I shall make my way, Betty."

Her eyes were troubled, as she said hurriedly, "Are you sure of that, Mark? If—*if* you should break down again. Oh, I know what's in your mind. You are going to drudge. And why should you, when Archie and I would be so delighted to have you here? You could help him. He has told me——"

"What has he told you?"

His sharp interrogation slightly puzzled her.

"Oh, he says that your hints have been invaluable."

So Archibald had withheld the truth. He heard Betty's voice entreating him to come to Cadogan Place. His heart was throbbing. Perhaps she wanted him.

"I c-c-can't," he stammered. "I have my p-pride."

"So had Lucifer," she retorted.

That she supposed him cold, he knew. When they parted, he smiled to himself because she said angrily: "You think of nothing but your *Songs of the Angels*!"

"Angels won't sing in London," he said.

Shortly after this he received a letter from Dudley McIntyre, the head of an historic publishing house. McIntyre had read the novel which would not sell, and begged to have the pleasure of meeting the author at an early date. This again was a piece of luck which Mark discovered, later, to be due to Tommy Greatorex.

Tommy, who loathed Conquest, had told McIntyre of what had passed. McIntyre had no love for Conquest and despised his business methods. When he met Mark, he took a fancy to him. Mark, for his part, was charmed with McIntyre, who represented the publisher of the old school: being all that Conquest was not: courteous, sympathetic, speaking with precision in well-chosen words untainted by slang. McIntyre, however, published *belles lettres*, biographies, books of travel, rather than novels. Still, he expressed a wish to see *The Songs of the Angels*, and said that the theme appealed to him.

"Not that I pretend to be a judge of what will sell or not sell," he concluded. "And I seldom pass an opinion upon a manuscript."

"I should be glad to undertake translations," said Mark.

"Will that be worth your while, Mr. Samphire?"

Mark frankly explained his position. He thought he was qualified to translate either French or Italian books. McIntyre said he would make a note of it, and did so, entering Mark's address in a small pocket-book.

"Finish your novel," said he at parting. "And give it undivided attention."

Accordingly, Mark remained at Weybridge. He realised that if this novel failed, he must become, as Betty said, a drudge; and he was certain that hack-writing meant the sacrifice of higher literary ambitions. McIntyre was right. He must make the effort of his life to grasp something substantial. If he failed, let him clutch at straws!

Necessity lent edge to the enterprise. Each morning he woke with an appetite for work which seemed to increase rather than diminish. He became so absorbed in his task that everything and everybody became subservient to it. Archibald had taken Betty abroad; Pynsent was in Paris; Jim Corrance had been summoned to New York; David Ross still held aloof. So, for six weeks or more, he was undisturbed by the claims of friendship: the only claims at that time which he would have considered.

But to such a temperament as Mark's, speech is vital. Having no one else, he talked with Mary. He told himself that Mary was a remarkable girl, endowed with a fund of practical common sense upon which he was entitled to draw. Mary walked every other Sunday, if it was fine, with the young fellow of whom mention has been made. The rest of her time was spent with her mother and in the prosecution of duties which lay within the apple-green palings of her home. Mrs. Dew kept one servant, a cook; Mary worked in the house and in the garden.

The Dews, mother and daughter, knew that Mark was a writer. Mrs. Dew, however, considered literary work not quite "genteel." When Mark said to her: "You know, Mrs. Dew, that I'm an author," she sniffed and replied: "I didn't think you liked it mentioned."

It is curious and instructive to trace any friendship to its source. Mark had

a character in his book not unlike Mary. The reviewers of his first novel agreed that Mark drew men with a firm touch; his women, on the other hand, were unconvincing, artificial, idealised. It was the most natural thing that he should say to Mary in his pleasant, friendly voice: ”I s-s-say, Honeydew, if you found yourself in such-and-such a quandary, what would you do?”

Mary answered this first question so simply and convincingly that it led to many others. Mark ignored her sex, talking to her as he talked to Pynsent and Corrance.

”Such a lot depends upon the success of this book,” he told her. ”Journalism means bread-and-scrape, at best cakes and ale, but I'm hungering for the nectar and ambrosia of Literature. I feel my power with the men, but with the women—I grope. What I don't know about your delightful sex, Mary, would fill an encyclopædia.”

He eyed Mary with wrinkled irritability as a type of composite womanhood. After all, he reflected, ”Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's lady are sisters under their skins!” Mary was a bridge by which a poor ignorant man might cross the gulf which separates the sexes. *The Songs of the Angels* was a love story. He submitted the plot to Mary, who confounded him by an apt suggestion.

”By Jove, Honeydew, you know all about it. I suppose you've had half a dozen lovers?”

Mary blushed.

”Only Albert Batley.”

He spared her confusion, but Mrs. Dew supplied details. Albert Batley had a nice growing business, as a contractor, in and about Weybridge, where houses were popping up like mushrooms in a night. Mrs. Dew fretfully complained that Mary did not know her own mind. Albert, it appeared, was quite willing to accept a mother-in-law as a permanent guest, if Mary would only accept him. ”But naturally I'm not considered,” she concluded, in that querulous whine which penetrated so far.

”Now, Mrs. Dew,” Mark replied, ”that won't do with me. Mary is as good as gold and your faithful slave.”

”She won't have me long, Mr. Samphire. I'd like to see her settled, before I die.”

Mark had met Albert, and been much entertained by him. Without wasting time in superfluous verbiage, Mr. Batley had given Mark to understand that he was ready to buy a wedding-ring, not to mention other trinkets, as soon as Mary gave him the word. If ever man was deeply, inextricably in Cupid's toils, Mr. Batley was he. *À propos* of this Mark said one day:

”You see, Honeydew, when a man is in love, he knows it.”

”It works the same way with a woman,” said Mary. ”Only more so.”

”Eh?” said Mark.

Mary explained that a girl really and truly in love was of necessity aware of her condition, because the fermentation, so to speak, took place in the bottle, instead of in the barrel with the bung out. ”With men,” she concluded, ”it often bubbles away.”

Mark detected a note of pain.

”My poor little Honeydew,” he said, with warm sympathy. ”You have suffered. Some day you must tell me about it.”

”I cared for a man,” she murmured, ”who cared nothing for me; but that’s over and done with.” Then she added, blushing: ”Albert knows all about it, and he says he doesn’t mind.”

”There’s no chance of the other——”

”No, no,” Mary interrupted. ”He married.”

”You will make Albert very happy,” said Mark; ”and you will be happy yourself.”

”I am happy now,” she replied with conviction.

Mark said no more; but Mary’s words gave him pause. She called herself happy. Happy—in what? Only one answer was possible. Inasmuch as she had given in fullest measure to others, happiness had been given to her.

CHAPTER XXX
A NOTE OF INTERROGATION

The Samphires returned to Cadogan Place in November. It was now settled that Archibald should take the Basilica whenever it was finished, but the world knew nothing of this till after Christmas, when there appeared paragraphs in the papers controlled by Conquest. One of these caught the eye of Betty, and she took it to her husband, with the direct question: ”Are you thinking of leaving St. Anne’s?”

He replied with a certain air of restraint: ”Yes.”

”Why?”

”My dearest, I can do better work there than here. I had not meant to speak about it to you—yet. Lord Vauxhall has paid me a very great compliment.”

”What sort of compliment has he paid me? Did he ask you to keep so important a matter from your wife?”

”I so understood him.”

"And your word is pledged?"

"Yes."

"Has he offered you more than you receive here?"

"We shall be richer by some hundreds a year."

"I am sorry," said Betty, with heightened colour. "Lord Vauxhall is shrewd. Had you seen fit to consult me, I should have implored you to remain where you are. Money is no object to you."

"True. But preferment——"

"Preferment! Promotion! That implies service. You have only been here eighteen months. There will be gossip about this."

"As if I cared for gossip."

"We will say no more about it," said Betty; "but I tell you frankly that I am hurt!"

She turned and left the room. That he should not have trusted her was hard to be borne; yet later she made allowances for him. Doubtless, Lord Vauxhall had insisted upon secrecy. Her husband's sense of honour had closed his lips. She had been unjust, unkind, a disloyal wife. She had even insulted him, hinting that an increase of income had lured him from duty. At this point she bathed her eyes, arranged her hair, and ran downstairs to beg pardon and entreat forgiveness. Archibald was magnanimous.

"You have shown the right feeling, dear Betty, which I knew you possessed. I am acting according to my lights."

Next day the Rector of St. Anne's wired to Mark to come to town; Mark replied that he had had a bad bout of influenza, in those days a new and virulent disease. Archibald, nervous about his Lenten sermons but laughing to scorn the possibility of catching influenza, went down to Weybridge in the afternoon. He found Mark looking pale and thin, but otherwise in good spirits, and on the high road to recovery.

"You're a valiant man to visit me. This confounded disease is so infectious. You laugh? You'll cry if you get it! I've been as weak as a baby. If it had not been for Honeydew——"

He spoke enthusiastically of all his nurse had done for him. Archibald nodded absently, turning over in his mind certain possible themes which he wished Mark to consider.

"Yes, yes," he interrupted. "She did what she could, I make no doubt."

"She's one of the very best," cried Mark. "I say—it was awfully good of you, old Archie, to run down here. I expect work has piled up."

"It has; it has. I want to speak to you about that." He paused for a moment, as a smile flickered across Mark's lips. Archibald, Mark was reflecting, had an axe to grind. He had not left home merely to visit a brother laid by the heels.

Suddenly his feeling which had flamed grew chill. He listened perfunctorily to some introductory remarks.

”My Lenten sermons are giving me grave anxiety; I find that something out of the common is expected. If you will bear with me, I'll walk over the—er—course which I've marked out.”

”Cut along!” said Mark.

Archibald winced. Mark had no sense of the fitness of things. He spoke at times as if he (the Rector of St. Anne's) were a boy in his teens. Perhaps a word in season might——

”*À propos*,” he said, with dignity, ”don't you think, my dear fellow, that it is time for you to put away certain childish—you will pardon the adjective—certain childish expressions. It's absurd to talk of a man of my weight—'cutting along'....”

”True! You can stroll if you like, as the placid Pecksniff strolled. You have put on weight, Archie.”

Archibald, indeed, was broader and thicker about the neck and shoulders. He had lost the look of youth; the hair on the top of his head was thinner; his eyes were less clear; his fine skin had become redder and coarser in texture.

”I carry great burdens,” he replied. ”Perhaps I ought not to ask you to share them.”

Mark responded instantly, touched by this unexpected solicitude: ”I'm all right.”

”You might come to us for a week. Betty will nurse you.”

”That is impossible. I must finish my book.”

”Oh, yes—your book. I am looking forward to reading that. But I wish you would turn your talents to something more serious than fiction. I——”

”Shall we talk about your work?”

Archibald smiled, but Mark fidgeted and frowned, as carefully culled platitudes fell upon his ear. Archibald was indeed strolling placidly down familiar paths to the great festival of Christendom. The very name of Easter had always quickened Mark's pulses. Hitherto he had hastened to the feast, the most joyful of pilgrims. Now he was shut out; or rather, the door stood wide open, but he dared not pass it. The ban lay upon him—and upon how many thousands? His imagination flared, revealing a multitude staring with yearning eyes at tables spread for others. Archibald, in his silky tones, was enumerating celestial joys. His words flowed like a pellucid stream.

”What are you smiling at?” he asked abruptly.

”I beg your pardon,” Mark replied, ”but you remind me of an alderman reciting to a starving mob the names of the dishes to which he and his corporation are about to sit down.”

Archibald had wit enough to see and feel the point. He saw, too, that Mark

was moved.

"You have an idea. I should like to hear it, although——"

"Although I am without the pale, you would say. Archie, if you would descend from your pulpit and walk in the shadows with me for a little while—and if then you could set forth my doubts and perplexities, how many, think you, of your congregation would not say: 'I, too, have wandered in those blind alleys.' And having pierced the crust of their indifference with your sympathy and insight, if then you could transmit the light which seems to have always blazed on you, this Easter would indeed be a Day of Resurrection to hundreds who now lie cold and dead." He paused, gazed keenly at Archibald, and continued: "But you—you cannot do that. You have not trod the wilderness...." He covered his face with his hand.

"It is true," said Archibald, in a low voice, "that I do lack an experience common, I fear, to hundreds of my parishioners. And if I cannot open their hearts, and you can, lend me your key."

Mark was silent. Then, as before, the sense that he had envied and hated this once dearly beloved brother made him generous.

"I will write down and send what is in my mind. No—don't thank me!"

He began to talk briskly of other things. Presently Mary came in and reminded him to take his medicine. Archibald had not seen her before. Twice during the previous summer Betty and he had come to Weybridge, but each day had been spent upon the river. Mark went into his bedroom, and Mary disappeared, to reappear a moment later with a tea-tray. Archibald was alone with her for a couple of minutes. She arranged the tea-things with quick, deft fingers, displaying the admirable lines of her figure as she moved to and fro, now standing upright, now bending down. In the soft light of the spring afternoon she looked charming, with the inexpressible freshness of youth and health. Archibald addressed her.

"You are," he was about to say "Mary," but changed it to "Miss Dew."

"Oh, no, I am Mary," she replied, smiling. "Your brother calls me 'Honeydew.'"

"My brother calls you a ministering angel."

His soft voice had that fluid quality which percolates everywhere. He meant to be polite, nothing more; he wished to thank a pretty girl who had nursed a brother: but to Mary his words had other significance; his glance became an indictment, his tone inquisitorial. Without reason, her cheeks flamed. Archibald turned aside, murmuring a commonplace. When he looked at her, after a discreet interval, she was composed but pale. She went out of the room and did not return.

"Um!" said Archibald to himself, "I must speak to Betty about this."

Not, however, till late did he find an opportunity. Harry Kirtling was dining in Cadogan Place, and loath to say good-night. The young fellow had crushed a muscle of his leg out hunting, and had come up to London to see a famous surgeon, who prescribed gentle walking exercise and massage. Harry complained bitterly of the hardship of spending a fortnight away from his kennels, but was consoled by Betty, who promised to entertain him. Despite his injury, he looked astonishingly well, and brought with him from Cumberland a breezy atmosphere of mountain and moor which Betty inhaled gratefully. He had managed to make it plain that he was still her devoted slave—a tribute which the best of women accept without scruple. And he had asked her advice upon a score of matters connected with Kirtling.

When Harry had taken his clean, lean body out of her drawing-room, Betty turned rather impatiently to Archibald.

"Has anything happened? You have been so glum. Surely you do not resent my asking Harry to dine without consulting you?"

"Harry?" His tone was heavily contemptuous. "Harry can waste as much of your time as you like to give him. Yes; something has happened."

He told his story.

"I don't believe it."

"The girl is attractive. Her mother, I am told, reckons herself a lady. Something must be done. I give you my word that I am not mistaken."

"I don't believe it," Betty repeated.

None the less, she did believe it. Here again Archibald's voice beguiled her understanding. He had acquired that power, invaluable to a clergyman or a barrister, of making every statement sound as if it were irrefutable fact.

"I went down to Weybridge to see Mark on important business, and for a quarter of an hour he sang this girl's praises. It is obvious that he wished to impress me, to make me see with his eyes."

"What is she like?" Betty asked, shortly.

Archibald described her with a deliberation which annoyed his wife.

"The girl is very comely, my dear; alluring, many men would call her. A seductive figure—round, but not too plump; the complexion of Hebe."

"That's enough," said Betty.

"I tried to do the girl justice," replied her husband with dignity. "Personally speaking, her type of beauty does not appeal to me, but as a man of the world I cannot deny that it may appeal irresistibly to others!"

"You call yourself a man of the world," said Betty suddenly. "You do not preach to us as a man of the world. If this girl loves Mark, if he has made her love him, you ought to be the first to urge him to marry her. From a pagan point of view such a marriage may seem disastrous, but from the Christian's——"

She confronted him with heaving bosom and flaming eyes. Her agitation and excitement amazed him. But he grasped the essential fact that he had blundered, that it might be difficult to retrieve the blunder. He was aware that some of his sermons moved his wife to the core, for she had told him so a score of times. He was also aware, but as yet in less degree, that as mere man he had aroused without adequately satisfying her expectations.

"If you choose to misinterpret me——" he began.

"But I don't choose. I ask you, you the preacher and teacher, to make plain a puzzle which you, not I, have propounded. Let us admit what you tell me. Heaven knows that Mark has lived a lonely and forlorn life. Never has he complained to me; but I have guessed, I have felt that—that—beneath the mask he chooses to wear a devil tears him. That devil drove him from the Church. Well, we know that misery loves company. He has talked to me about this girl. She is a plucky creature, like Mark, inasmuch as she faces adversity with a smile. She has a selfish, querulous mother to whom she is devoted. Such a girl would appeal to such a man. And now you tell me that she is attractive. It is significant that Mark never mentioned that to me. I take back what I said. I believe you are right. Mark *has* learned to love this girl, and she loves him. And what are you going to do about it? And in what capacity? As a man of the world? Or as a priest of the Most High God?

"I beg you to compose yourself."

"You can compose me by telling the truth——"

"You dare to imply that——"

"I dare be honest with my husband. I have not been happy for some weeks, and you must have noticed it. Sometimes, particularly of late, I look for the man I married, and I find somebody else. Let me finish! I am too conscious of my own shortcomings not to be aware that between most husbands and wives lie troubled waters only to be passed by mutual faith and patience. Why, happiness is faith; and women, I often think, are on the whole happier than men, because their faith is stronger. A woman can believe in her child, in her husband, in her God. Well, as years passed, my faith in God grew dim, and you restored my sight. But now, somehow, I no longer see so clearly. Is it my fault or yours? I listen to your sermons, and then I come back to this luxurious house, and somebody tells me that you are *persona grata* at Windsor—that you are sure to be made a bishop, as if preferment were salvation; and——"

"My dear!" said Archibald, "it is late, and I have half a dozen letters to write. You have been talking in an unrestrained manner. You are not yourself."

He left the room, erect, impassive, master of himself, but not of her. She gazed defiantly after him, clenching her slender fingers. Intuition told her that this man was trying to serve God and Mammon, but when he came to bed an

hour later, she owned herself humbly in the wrong. Again Archibald was magnanimous, assuring his dearest Betty that already he had forgiven and forgotten her offence. The "forgotten" sounded patronising. As if he, with his memory, could forget! She lay awake, perplexed and dismayed, for she knew that Mark was still so dear to her that the thought of his caring for any other woman was insupportable.

CHAPTER XXXI
BETTY SEES DANGER SIGNALS

Second thoughts constrained Archibald not to interfere with Mark. He told himself that he had been alarmed unnecessarily. Mark was in no position to marry a penniless girl; the infatuation—if infatuation had been aroused—would subside, the more quickly, doubtless, if undisturbed. Moreover, he was too busy to give affairs other than his own more than a passing thought. Four days after the visit to Weybridge he received from Mark a huge envelope filled with rough notes and suggestions for a course of Lenten sermons. With these (and supplementary to them) were a score of sheets of foolscap setting forth the phases of modern unbelief, or want of belief. Archibald read this record with a keen appreciation of its dramatic value, but—it would be unfair to suppress the fact—touched to issues higher than those involved in rhetoric. His extraordinary "flair" had not been at fault. Mark had given him more than ideas: insight into a human heart. And whatever he saw Archibald could describe with emphasis and effect. At once the plan and purpose of his sermons were made clear. He would take infidelity as his theme, and treat it synthetically, putting together all forms of unbelief, and exhibiting them as the root from which evil sprang and flourished. Faithlessness was the common denominator of suffering and sin. He remembered what Betty had said about happiness in women being dependent on faith, and told her that wittingly or unwittingly she had hit a truth. But if he expected her to hit another, he was disappointed. She said quietly that she had drawn a bow at a venture.

About this time she paid a visit to Weybridge, Mark still pleading work as an excuse for not coming to Cadogan Place. Archibald awaited her report with awakened interest. Betty told her husband that Mark was certainly madly in love—with his heroine.

"And he tells me," she concluded triumphantly, "that Mary, who seems a

nice modest girl, is going to marry a Mr. Batley. When *The Songs of the Angels* is sent off to his publisher, he will come to us."

About mid-Lent the novel was despatched to town. After a few days a letter came from McIntyre, accepting the MS. and offering better terms than Mark had expected—fifty pounds upon the day of publication and a royalty upon a sliding scale. An American publisher, Cyrus Otway, who had large dealings with McIntyre's house, happened to be in England. He offered Mark similar terms for the American rights. Mark was jubilant, but McIntyre predicted limited sales.

"It will be well received," he said. "My readers have no doubt on that point, but we do not expect it to be popular. You have an admirable style, but your subject—eh?—is sublimated: over the heads of many. And the story is sad. The public likes a happy ending. Other things being equal, the story with the happy ending sells four to one at least. Mr. Cyrus Otway would like to meet you." Mark lunched with Cyrus Otway, and was entertained handsomely.

"I'll be frank with you, Mr. Samphire," said the Boston publisher, a thin, pale, carefully dressed man, with a typical New England manner as prim and precise as a spinster's, and very bright, restless eyes. "This is an experiment on our part—a leap in the dark. Our people, sir, know a good thing when they see it. But the difficulty lies in making them see it. Have you done any dramatic work? You have not. Ah, there's a goldfield! And, if I may be allowed to say so, I think that you would strike rich ore there. You have dramatic power and a re—markable insight into character...."

Mark repeated this conversation to Betty. He was staying at Cadogan Place and in high spirits. The drudgery of hack-writing no longer impended. Already he was in a position to do the work he liked best where and when and how he pleased.

"A hundred pounds is not much," said Betty doubtfully.

"It will last me a year," said Mark.

Meantime, Archibald's Lenten sermons were filling St. Anne's every Sunday and exciting widespread comment. Mark had seen and revised the first three before he left Weybridge. The others were prepared and written out under Mark's eye in the comfortable library at Cadogan Place. The Rector of St. Anne's made no scruple of accepting what help his brother could give him. Mark honoured all cheques, reflecting that this was a labour of love, which made for his happiness as well as Betty's. It never struck him that he was compounding a moral felony. Such knowledge came later; but, at the moment, had any person—Lady Randolph, for instance—pointed out what he was doing, he would have indignantly (and honestly) repudiated his own actions.

Betty listened to every word of these sermons and told herself she was the wife of an evangelist. None the less, she did not ignore the fact that a sharp

distinction lay between Archibald as Man and Archibald as Priest. One day she said to Mark, ”Somehow one does not expect a great preacher to lose his temper because the cook has sent up cod without oyster sauce.”

”Oh, his little weaknesses ought to endear him to such a woman as you are. He tells us each Sunday what a man ought to be, and on weekdays he shows us what a man is. A preacher without his little infirmities would be as uninteresting as—as cod without oyster sauce.”

After Easter, Mark returned to Weybridge. Betty missed him so much that she had a fit of nervous depression which lasted two days. She made a resolution to devote herself to parochial work, to begin a course of stiff reading: pamphlets dealing with the better housing of the poor, and kindred subjects.

Mark was now absorbed in writing another novel, and in the correction of proofs. *The Songs of the Angels* appeared simultaneously in New York and London upon the first of May. Mark wrote to Betty that he had never felt in such good health, or more sanguine about the future. He was living in the open air, and had the appetite and complexion of a gipsy.

Archibald, meanwhile, was working hard on committees, hand-in-glove with a ducal philanthropist, whose music-loving duchess declared that Mr. Samphire had the best tenor voice in the kingdom. In return for this high compliment, the Rector of St. Anne’s was persuaded to sing at the duchess’s small dinner parties; and this led to a widening of a circle of acquaintance, which now included some very great people indeed. Betty found herself dining out three days in the week, and was amazed to discover that her husband enjoyed this mild dissipation. As a celebrity he began to be courted wherever he went, and his photograph embellished certain shops. Young women entreated him to write in their albums.

The world said that Chrysostom was a good fellow and still unspoiled, but his wife noted an ever-increasing complacency and compliancy which gave her pause. He had begged her, it will be remembered, to keep at arm’s length certain frisky dames whom she had met at Newmarket and Monte Carlo, when she was under Lady Randolph’s wing. These ladies were of no particular rank or position. But when Lady Cheyne, notorious all over Europe before and after she married her marquess, called upon Mrs. Samphire, Archibald insisted upon Betty returning the call and accepting an invitation to dine at Cheyne House. Betty protested, but he said blandly: ”I have reason to know that Lady Cheyne is an indefatigable worker in Chelsea. She will be a parishioner of ours when we go to the Basilica. Personally I do not believe half the stories they tell about her.”

”I should hope not,” said Betty. ”If a quarter be true, she is dyed scarlet.”

Often she talked to Lady Randolph, but never with the candour of bygone days. Intuition told her that her old friend had no great liking for Archibald, although she rejoiced at his success.

"You were at Cheyne House last night," said Lady Randolph, with the twinkle in her eye which Betty knew so well. "I dare swear the dinner, my dear, was better than the company."

"Archie says the dinner was perfection." Then she flushed slightly, remembering that her husband ought to know, for he had spared but few dishes. "Have you read Mark's new book?"

"I have," said Lady Randolph.

At once Betty began to praise the *Songs*. It was to be inferred from her sparkling eyes and eager gestures that Mark's success had become vital to her. Lady Randolph drew conclusions which she kept to herself. But that night she said to Lord Randolph: "I saw Betty Samphire this afternoon. It is as I feared. Her parson, the man beneath the surplice, never inspired anything warmer than respect."

"Ay, say you so? Dear me—that's a pity. But there's stout stuff under the surplice."

"Stout?" Lady Randolph smiled. "You have hit the word, Randolph. Stout—and growing stouter. And some of the stuff is—stuffing."

"My dear, you are severe. *Who drives fat horses should himself be fat.* I have noticed that your good round parson is the most popular; your lean fellow makes everybody uncomfortable. Archibald is thought highly of. He is approachable; he has great gifts of organisation; he is liked by Nonconformists and Roman Catholics."

"No doubt," replied Lady Randolph impatiently. "In a word he can lunch at Lambeth and dine at Cheyne House, but I am thinking of Betty. A sword impends."

In a vague, mysterious way Betty herself was conscious of danger. As a girl the pageant of the London season had excited her. Her sensibilities, too keen, her adaptability, her faculty for enjoyment, inevitably were overstrained during those feverish months between April and August. When she married a clergyman she told herself that she was out of the rapids and at rest in a placid backwater. Now, involuntarily, she had been sucked into the current again. And curiously intermingled with the feeling of apprehension was a thrill. At times the desire to let herself go, to fling herself, like a Mænad, into the gay crowds, to be reckless, as they were, became almost irresistible. The devil-may-care temperament of the De Courcys set her pulses a-tingling. But so far she had restrained these longings. And then one night, in late June, Harry Kirtling met her at a ducal house to which Archibald deemed it a duty to go. A splendid entertainment had been provided. A famous prima donna and a brilliant violinist enchanted lovers of music; a French comedian travelled from Paris to recite; minor luminaries twinkled round these fixed stars. A few choice spirits, however, had withdrawn to a small

room set apart for cards, wherein a young guardsman had opened a bank at baccarat. This was in flagrant bad taste, for both host and hostess detested gambling. Yet it lent a spice to the adventure. Lady Cheyne told her cavalier that she felt as if she were meeting a lover in a church. When the fun was getting furious, Betty and Kirtling came in on the heels of curiosity. Betty drew back, but Harry held her arm. A moment later he was recognised and invited to try his luck. Always easy-going and thoughtless, he pressed forward, half dragging Betty with him. Lady Cheyne looked up, saw Betty, and screamed with laughter. Her mocking laughter roused the devil in Betty. She had not gambled since her marriage; and gambling in all its forms was regarded by Archibald as a deadly sin. Upon the Sunday succeeding Derby Day he had preached upon this very subject. He had shown that betting had become a national vice; he had described with dramatic force its moral effect upon servants and children. This was one of a series of sermons upon the sins of the day, in the preparation of which the Rector of St. Anne's needed no assistance from others: culling his facts from pamphlets and Blue Books, and marshalling them with the skill which comes from long practice. To such sermons Betty lent an indifferent ear. They were of the Gradgrind type: too didactic, too florid, too obvious, to appeal to the intellectual members of his congregation. He preached in the same Cambyses vein upon drunkenness and gluttony. When Lady Cheyne laughed, Betty was vouchsafed a vision of her husband as she had seen him ten minutes before, sharing a *pâté* with a be-diamonded countess who admitted frankly that she lived to sup.

"You must not peach, Mrs. Samphire!" cried Lady Cheyne, turning up her impudent nose.

For a moment the game was stopped, and those present stared at Betty.

"Peach?" echoed Harry, who had certainly taken more than his allowance of champagne. "Not she! Come on, Betty, let us venture a sovereign!" He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a five-pound note. "Halves?" Betty nodded. "When it's gone, we'll stop—eh?"

Betty nodded again, beginning to laugh. One of the young men offered her his chair.

"You play," said Harry. "I'm such an unlucky beggar." He pushed the counters which he had received in exchange for his note in front of her. The dealer picked up the pack in front of him, and began to deal. Up till then he had won. Now his luck deserted him and fell on Betty.

"*Tapez sur la veine*," said Harry. "Pile it on, Betty!"

By this time Betty was sorry she had sat down. In the hope of losing what she had won already, she did pile it on, the banker making no objection. But still she won, and won, and won. And then, in the middle of the noise and laughter, the host walked in—and out! But the expression on his face put an instant stop

to the proceedings. The young guardsman, looking exceedingly foolish, pulled out a pencil and began computing his losses to Betty.

"I make it seventy-five pound," he said. "I'll send it to you to-morrow, Mrs. Samphire."

"No, no," said Betty.

"Pooh," said Harry. "You forget that I'm your partner. We'll have a spree together with this ill-gotten gold." He laughed, and the others joined in, but Betty smiled dismally. All London would be prattling of this escapade within a few hours.

Going home in the brougham she told Archibald what had passed. The light inside the carriage was dim, but she felt rather than saw his face stiffen into amazed displeasure.

"And the Duke came in?"

She understood from his tone that being caught was not the least part of the offence.

"I have said that I am very sorry."

"You have made me ridiculous," said Archibald in a tone she had not heard from him before.

"You will make yourself ridiculous," she retorted, "if you take this too seriously."

He exclaimed hotly: "I would not have had it happen for five hundred pounds."

The opportunity was irresistible to murmur: "The moral obliquity of it seems to have escaped you."

"What? You laugh? You sneer? This is too much, too much."

"Much too much," Betty answered disdainfully. "I said I was sorry. Well, I'm nothing of the kind—now. I'm glad. And I shall play again, if I choose, and back horses, as I used to do, when I was a happy sinner."

To this Archibald made no reply, and Betty told herself that she was a shrew. As the brougham stopped she said in a low voice: "Archie, I apologise."

Her husband, in a voice colder than liquid air, replied: "I accept your apology, Betty, but let me beg that nothing of this sort occurs again."

CHAPTER XXXII

BETTY MAKES GOOD RESOLUTIONS

During July a deanery in the West of England fell vacant and was offered to Archibald Samphire. Conquest, acting on a hint from Lord Vauxhall, came post haste to Cadogan Place. It happened that he was shown into the drawing-room, and it also happened that on the balcony Betty sat in a chair, fast asleep, with a dull novel on her lap. The balcony was a pretty place, protected from the sun by a striped awning and filled with palms and plants.

Conquest looked more enormous than usual in a light grey frock-coat, open in front, revealing a vast extent of white waistcoat. His eyes sparkled keenly beneath the heavy black brows. Archibald found himself shirking these piercing eyes, as he explained that his library was filled with a deputation of working men, from whom he had escaped with difficulty. Conquest nodded impatiently as Archie's polished periods fell softly upon the air heavy with the heat of summer and the perfume of many flowers.

"Yes, yes," he said; "I'm obliged. I hate to be kept waiting. About this deanery—hey?"

"I am giving the matter earnest consideration."

"You can't afford to take it," said Conquest abruptly. "If you go there, you'll stay there, mark my words! That'll be the end of you. I told Vauxhall you'd too much common sense to chuck him. If it were a bishopric, of course, Vauxhall would not stand in the way. I can't pick my words. And by this time you and I understand each other."

He spread out his broad, pudgy hands in a gesture familiar to Archibald.

"How did you hear?"

"It's my business to hear things. I've a hundred eyes and a thousand ears. Well?"

"It's great preferment."

"You will be 'Mr. Dean' of course. But you'll be out of sight and out of mind. How did you get this offer? By being on the spot. I'll say a word more, only you mustn't give me away. You met the Prime Minister at Belgrave House the other day. My friend, he had heard you preach a certain sermon at Westchester, but, by gad! he'd forgotten you."

"Forgotten me?" exclaimed Archibald. "Why, he came up as soon as the ladies left the dining-room, and was most civil."

"He can be civil when he likes," said Conquest drily. "All the same, he had forgotten your name; he did not know what you were doing. The Duchess, who is a capital friend of yours and a good creature although she does sniff, sang your praises for five minutes. And that did the trick. Of course, he made inquiries; he satisfied himself that you are a corking good worker and a discreet fellow, and all that, but, bless my soul, aren't there hundreds of such? Lord—yes. But they don't dine at Belgrave House. Now, look here, I've no time to waste. I came here

to do you a friendly turn. You will gain far more than you will lose by refusing this so-called preferment. And I'll see that your self-sacrifice is duly recorded. Trust me for that. You think you've made a mark. So you have; so you have; but you must deepen the impression. You've a magnificent voice, but, man—it won't carry four hundred miles. If you want it to be heard by the right people you must preach in a London pulpit."

"My dear Conquest, I really——"

"Pooh, pooh! You don't like me the less because I talk straight when no one is listening. Now—stand and deliver a monosyllable. Are you going to chuck Vauxhall? Yes—or No?"

"I have no intention of chucking Lord Vauxhall or anybody else."

"Right. That means No. Good-bye. You'll see a leader in next Saturday's *Mercury* which will warm the cockles of your heart."

Before Archibald could reply, Conquest was out of the room. For a big man he could move—when he so chose—with amazing quickness and lightness. He disappeared, leaving a vacuum which Betty filled. As Archibald turned, after ringing the bell for a servant to show out Conquest, he saw his wife standing in the window, framed by the ferns and palms.

"Betty!" he exclaimed.

"Why didn't you kick that—that beast downstairs? I heard what he said. He insulted you. I was asleep outside. His voice woke me. For your sake, not mine, I resisted the temptation to come forward, and—oh, I could have flown at him!"

Her bosom heaved; her eyes sparkled. Archibald stared at her dully, wondering what words would meet this emergency.

"Have you nothing to say?" she cried.

"My dear," he said, "you do not understand."

"Then explain—explain!"

"Conquest means well. He is our friend; a rough diamond, I grant you, but he means well. He is our friend."

He repeated the words, sensible that they were inadequate, yet unable to find others.

"Save us from such friends!"

"I had almost decided to send a refusal."

"Why—why, only last night you were on edge to accept. You gave me a dozen *pros* against my two or three *cons*."

"And perhaps," said Archibald, in what Betty sometimes called his "antiseptic" manner, "those *cons* outweighed the *pros*, although numerically less. Conquest takes your view of the matter. He feels that I have undertaken a task here in Chelsea, which cannot be abandoned. He——"

”He tells you to *reculer pour mieux sauter*,” said Betty derisively, ”to refuse a deanery and accept a bishopric later! He—the apostle of expediency, of diplomacy, of compromise! Well—I do not judge him. But he counts you to be of his own opinion. He brands you as a time-server, a worldling, a parasite. And you let him do it—and shake hands with him! And, on next Saturday—you will read a leader in the *Mercury* which will warm the cockles of your heart.”

”Protest would have been wasted,” said Archibald. ”If you will excuse me, my dear, I will go downstairs. The deputation is waiting for me.”

”One moment,” said Betty. ”I have something to say which must be said—here and now. Last night you spoke eloquently enough of that west country and the life we might lead there. And I—I,” she faltered and blushed, ”I was not honest when I urged you to stay here. I am drifting into the old hateful whirlpool from which I thought I had escaped for ever. I pictured to myself life in a cathedral close—stagnant, dun-coloured, full of uninteresting duties—and I recoiled from it. I smelled that old smell of cleaned gloves at all the parties. I thought of myself, not of you. But now, I beseech you to consider what London means to both of us—to you and to me. And if Mr. Conquest is right, if your sacred profession is a trade, if great success in it can be achieved only by such self-advertisement as he thinks justifiable, is such success worth having to a Christian gentleman?”

Archibald frowned. Then, feeling that his powers of speech had returned to him, he answered at length, citing certain prelates whose piety, sincerity, and humility were above reproach. Conquest took the worldling’s view. He was more than half pagan, and he posed openly as a scoffer and a cynic. Still, he was right in contending that the great places in the Church’s gift were held by those whom a wide knowledge of the world had equipped. Such knowledge was not to be gleaned in a cathedral close lying in the heart of a sleepy west country town. He hoped that his dearest Betty would not misunderstand him when he confessed frankly that he did aspire to the highest positions, not for what they might hold of honour or emolument, but for the power they conferred of doing widespread good to others. Warming to his theme, he flooded Betty’s perplexed mind with scores of ready-made phrases—phrases laboriously accumulated: stones, so to speak, with which he had fortified his own position.

”Oh—I am muddled, muddled,” said Betty.

”I have been muddled myself,” her husband admitted. ”Modern life must perplex and distress the wisest. And all of us at times feel a desire to get out of the hurly-burly. Shall I say that last night, feeling worn out and discouraged, I did long for the quiet and peace of that west-country deanery; but this morning—now,” he expanded his chest, ”I am myself again.”

He smiled assuringly and left the room.

When he had gone, Betty went back to the chair among the ferns and palms.

She tried to go over what her husband had said, to look at the matter fairly from his point of view. But the effort was greater than she could compass. She felt as if she had been submerged in a torrent of words, and of these words nothing was left—only a sense of desolation and isolation.

When she saw Mark a few days later, the article in the *Mercury* had been published. Conquest was given to boasting that he could "boom" an author with such subtlety that none, not even the man himself, suspected what was being done. The readers of the *Mercury* rose from the perusal of the article in question convinced that a seasonable and well-deserved tribute had been paid to a saintly and self-sacrificing preacher of Christ's gospel. Archibald, reading it, was aware that his cheeks, as also the cockles of his heart, were very warm indeed. Betty did not read the article. Mark, however, was full of it, not knowing that Conquest had written it.

"The truth is," he told Betty, "the truth is, Betty, that I did not like his acceptance of the Basilica. It bothered me a good deal. Now this proves plainly that Archie is above worldly considerations. Not another man of his age would have refused such an offer."

Betty asked for news of the *Songs.*

Of this Mark had nothing very encouraging to tell. The book, handsomely received by the Press, was in fair demand at the libraries, but less than two thousand copies had been sold. In America as yet it had not, so Otway wrote, "caught on." The new novel, *A Soul Errant*, was sure to be a success. He talked with animation for half an hour, describing his characters.

"You live for this," said Betty abruptly.

"Do you blame me," he answered quickly, "because I make the most of what is left?"

"I beg your pardon," she replied.

Later, she inquired after Mary Dew.

"She's having a better time of it," Mark declared. "I don't mind telling you, Betty, that I've tackled her mother. I told her she was a slave-owner, a despot, and a bully. She took it like a lamb, and things at Myrtle Cottage are easier, I can assure you."

"And Albert what's-his-name, who is going to marry your paragon——"

"Albert Batley is making money. He has a big building contract near Surbiton. He will give Honeydew all she wants, and deserves."

"You know nothing of women, Mark."

"So the critics say—confound 'em; but I tell you, Betty, I know a good woman when I see her."

"There you are; displaying your ignorance. You talk in that foolish masculine manner of good women, as if good women were in a class by themselves,

and different from all others. Why good and evil are such relative terms that sometimes I can't tell one from the other."

"Then you're a miserable sinner, and blind to boot. Good, the genuine article, can never be mistaken for evil, although evil, I grant you, may counterfeit good. Bless me! I've been puzzled a score of times by sinners, but I never mistook a saint."

"How many have you met?"

"More than you think," he replied gravely.

"And where do you place me? Among the sheep or the goats?"

Mark wondered why her lips trembled. She looked tired and pale, much paler than usual.

"What a question!" he said lightly.

"I'll answer it myself, Mark. I have an extraordinary appreciation of good. There are times when I have soared—yes, that's the word—into another world. I had dreams, visions if you like, when I was a girl, but the most vivid experience of the kind came upon me unexpectedly—in Westchester Cathedral, upon the day Archie preached his sermon. I grasped Something that morning which cannot be described, but It was real substance. I grasped It, and I let It go. Since I have wondered what It was. Perhaps I—touched—God."

"Ah!" said Mark. "Go on, go on!"

She saw that his eyes were shining, that the expression which she had missed from his face since her marriage had come back.

"Go—on," she sighed. "I am going back. Can you help me?"

She turned to him with a pathetic gesture of entreaty. The light faded in Mark's face. He began to stammer.

"If I c-c-could——"

"You believed once. And now your faith is gone! Why? How? You *must* tell me."

In her excitement she laid her hand upon his wrist, clutching it fiercely. He felt that her fingers were burning, that the fire in them was fluid, that in another moment the flame would flare in him, consuming them both. He rose, releasing his wrist with violence.

"I c-c-can't tell you that." He moved half a dozen paces from her, before he turned. When he spoke again his voice was quite steady. "Faith oozes from some people imperceptibly: there is a steady drain of which they may be unaware, but my faith left me in an instant. It may come back as suddenly. It may be redeemed. I have thought sometimes that faith is God's franchise which is given freely to all, and taken away from the unworthy. And once taken away, it is never given again, never. It must be ransomed—paid for."

As he spoke he was aware that at any cost to his own feelings the talk must

be turned into safer channels. His first impulse had been one of unreasoning fear and horror. When she touched him, he lost for a terrible moment his self-control. Love is a despot whose lightest word may make the bravest coward. Seeing her distress, hearing her quavering voice, feeling her trembling fingers, he had divined his own weakness.

"Paid for?" She echoed the words. "How?"

"By sacrifice," he answered slowly. "By blood sacrifice."

When he had gone, she went to her room and locked the door. Alone, her face flamed with anger against herself. Had she betrayed her secret? She could not answer the question. Had he spoken coldly, precisely—on purpose? Nine women out of ten distrust a man's works, and have absurd and infantile faith in his words. But Betty had had a surfeit of words from her husband. Of late, much of her leisure had been wasted in trying to determine their value. Archibald's works were self-explanatory. He was indefatigable as parish priest and philanthropist. Such work could be measured; it lay within a circle, say the inner circle of the Underground Railway. But his sonorous phrases, his dogmas and doctrines, were immeasurable: including this world, past and present, and the world to come. It was natural, therefore, that finding herself compassless in a sea of sentences, she would steer by the light of such fixed stars as frequent communions, charity organisation, the visiting of the sick, and the crusade against alcohol. In a word, she had come to the conclusion that it did not matter very much what a man said, but that what he did was vital to his own welfare and the welfare of others, the true expression of his character and temperament. Whenever a woman touches the fringe of such a commonplace, you may be sure that she will watch a man's actions, the more closely, perhaps, because she has become too heedless of his words. Betty had seen Mark shrink with a violent effort from her touch; he had kept out of Cadogan Place during the summer; he had lost faith in revealed religion. What if these effects were to be traced to one cause—herself?

When she was able to think articulately, pleasure in her discovery was obliterated by pain—the bitter pangs of retrospection. Why had she doubted him—and herself? By what irony of fate had she given herself to Archibald? But almost instantly she curbed these unavailing regrets. The past was irrevocable. What did the future hold for Mark and for her? One thing was certain: they must meet but rarely, perhaps not at all.

And then ensued a struggle, from which she emerged weak indeed, but triumphant. Once again she was conscious of that sense of detachment, of looking in spirit upon the flesh; once again a strange giddiness warned her that only in fancy had she attained to the heights, that the cliffs were yet to be scaled.

When she met her husband that afternoon a closer observer than he might have detected a tenderness in her voice and manner: the first-fruits of a resolution to do her duty as wife to a good man. That night, when she said her prayers, she thanked God passionately, because she could esteem and respect the Rector of St. Anne's.

CHAPTER XXXIII
ILLUMINATION

In August the Archibald Samphires moved from Cadogan Place to a house on the Embankment, which belonged to Lord Vauxhall, and was part of that property which he was so anxious to populate with the "right kind of people." The house faced the Thames and contained some charming rooms, which combined the quaintness and fine proportions of the old Chelsea houses with such modern luxuries as electric light and radiators. The house in Cadogan Place had been papered and decorated by a former tenant, whose taste was severely æsthetic. Betty abhorred the olive-greens, the dingy browns, the sickly ochres of the Burne-Jones school. But she had accepted them philosophically, reflecting that houses in London must be repapered and decorated more often than in the country. None the less, she sometimes told herself that certain fits of depression were due to her bilious-coloured walls, and that Babbit's theories, as set forth by the Squire's widow, were worth consideration.

Now she had been given a free hand, at a moment when fashion was changing with Protean swiftness from darkness to light. Rose-red and yellow, delicate greens, ethereal blues, and white-enamelled woodwork wooed the fancy of housewives. Betty told Lady Randolph that she was no longer a woman, but a colour scheme diffusing prismatic tints.

"The rainbow after the storm."

Betty glanced up quickly. Did her old friend guess that she had passed through a storm? Or was it a happy allusion to that frightful bistre-coloured paper in her bedroom in Cadogan Place?

"I shall be happy here," she said gravely.

They were standing in the drawing-room of the new house. The Admiral's Chippendale furniture was in its place, delicately revealed against lovely white panelling. The walls were rose-coloured, of a paper whose texture was as that

of brocade. The general effect was fresh and joyous: vernal in the delicacy of its tints, without a hint of the *bonbonnière*. Outside, the sun was declining in the west, and the river ran all golden past the trees and meads of Battersea Park. Some barges, laden with hay, were gliding by on the ebb-tide.

"Archie's room will be ready to-morrow," said Betty, "and we ought to be in the day after. You have all pitied me, but I have enjoyed the dead season immensely."

Lady Randolph, who was passing through town on her way to Scotland from Birr Wood, nodded understandingly.

"The room is just like you, Betty, and that is the prettiest compliment, my dear, I have ever paid you. And I must say that the dead season has agreed with you. I never saw you look more alive."

"The fact is," said Betty seriously, "I have been setting more than one house in order."

Lady Randolph smiled. "I have seen—I have guessed—— Ah, well, we wives try to remould our husbands, and the time is not wasted if we succeed in remoulding ourselves. My dear, I must fly. Can I give you a lift?"

Betty said that much remained to be done, but after her friend had gone she showed no inclination to set about doing it. Instead, she sat by the open window, gazing at the river flowing slowly and silently to the sea. Already she had come to regard this as the great waterway of her thoughts. She rejoiced because she was about to live upon its banks; she recognised its suggestion and symbolism, its myriad beauties, its mystery and power.

At this moment she was reflecting that the Thames was a source of pleasure and profit to man, because man, as embodied by the Thames Conservancy, controlled it. When it burst its banks, the abomination of desolation followed. Without the innumerable dams and locks cribbing and confining it, these splendid waters would be wasted. Now they percolated everywhere, into hundreds and thousands of homes.

Would it be so with her own life? It ran in a channel other than the one she would have chosen, had choice been given her; it was diverted to uses she had not apprehended; it was likely to be diffused infinitely, trickling here and there, instead of rushing free and untrammelled over a course of its own making. Since that memorable interview with Mark, Betty had accepted the limitations which duty imposed. She had not shirked the trivial tasks of a parson's wife, albeit she was tempted to spend more time (and money) than was lawful in alluring shops. She had not seen Mark alone. She had put from her comment and criticism of her husband: striving to think of the strength that was in him rather than the weakness.

Now she was aware that these efforts had not been made in vain. Life had

become easier, happier, more profitable to herself and others. She dared to look forward, and refrained from looking back.

Presently she rose up, glanced, smiling, at the pretty room, and leaving it reluctantly went downstairs. Archibald was out of town for a few days on duty in the Midlands, and by the morrow she hoped that all his furniture would be moved. Part had come from Cadogan Place that afternoon, and, before returning home, she wished to see it placed in the right room. In the hall she met one of the servants, who was acting as caretaker. In answer to a question, the man said his master's desk had arrived in the van which was leaving. Betty entered her husband's room trying to remember the exact spot where Archie wished his desk to stand. It was an immense affair, with a fluted, revolving top, which, when closed, locked itself and all drawers. As she crossed the threshold of the room, she remembered what Archibald had said. The desk had been placed in the wrong position.

"Oh, Dibdin," she exclaimed, "that will never do. Have the men gone?"

Dibdin said respectfully that the van was still at the door, but suggested that the men should move the desk on the morrow. Betty, however, was anxious to see how it looked in the place her husband had chosen. So the men were summoned. Doubtless, they were tired, and possibly sulky at being called as they were about to drive away. The desk was very heavy and awkward to move; it stood on a rug upon a slippery parquet floor. The men, using unnecessary violence, canted it slightly forward. In the effort to steady it, their feet slipped, the desk fell forward with a crash, and burst open: the fluted lid flying back, and the contents of a dozen pigeon-holes and drawers being scattered over the floor. However, upon examination it was found that no damage had been done. The desk was lifted and placed in the desired position, and the men dismissed. Dibdin looked so dismayed that Betty laughed.

"Why, Dibdin, all's well that ends well."

"Master is so particular about his desk," said Dibdin. He had been with Archibald before his marriage. "He'd never allow me to touch his papers."

"You shan't touch them now," said Betty. "I'll arrange them, Dibdin, before I go home."

Dibdin went out, leaving his mistress sitting on the floor surrounded by notebooks, cheque-books, manuscripts, and all the accessories which usually cover a busy man's desk. As she began to arrange these, she reflected that the best-laid plans gang agley. Archibald had insisted upon locking up everything, and yet, despite precaution—his precious desk had burst open. What a lot of MMS. to be sure! And she had not the vaguest idea into what drawers and pigeon-holes they ought to go. Archibald had a reasonable dislike of being disturbed when at work, and when he was not at work the huge desk was always locked.

Betty recognised an enormous pile of papers as sermons. Some were type-written, date and text being inscribed upon the outside. Betty touched them tenderly: her husband's title-deeds, so to speak, to the honour and respect she bore him. Looking at them she blushed faintly, thinking of the warmer sentiment they had provoked. As she blushed her glance fell upon the sermon she had just picked up. This bore no text, but across it, in Archibald's handwriting, were two words: *Whit-Sunday, Westchester.*

The words provoked a score of memories. Once more she knelt in the chancel of that splendid fane, hearing the flute-like notes of the boy; once more she was conscious of being whirled aloft to ineffable heights. Then she dropped to earth as suddenly, with a vivid realisation that if this sermon had never been preached, she would not be here in this house, the wife of the preacher. With this reflection came a desire to read the sermon. She laid it aside, while she finished the work of replacing the other MSS. Then she closed the desk, and discovered that the lock was hampered. She was wondering whether she ought to seal it, when she remembered that it would be easy to lock up the room. The light was failing, yet the fancy took her that she would like to read her husband's sermon in her own room, overlooking the river as it flowed to the sea.

She went upstairs carrying the MS. in her hand, and sat down. The sun was about to set; and the river ran red, no longer golden. Shadows obscured the city beyond. A mist was stealing up from the east, and the barges floating into it were swallowed up.

Betty unrolled the MS., spread it upon her knee, and began to read. But at the first glance she blinked, as if her eyesight were deceiving her. Then with a muttered exclamation of surprise, she held the sheets of blue foolscap to the light, and examined them attentively. The MS., from beginning to end, was in Mark's handwriting. Here and there words were interpolated or excised. In the margin were her husband's notes, but the MS. was Mark's. What did it mean?

She read it through. Yes: as it was written, so it had been preached, and it had been written by Mark!

Why had she not guessed as much before? She rolled up the MS., tied it with the red tape which the orderly Archibald used, and went downstairs. The only other sermon in Mark's handwriting was the "Purity" sermon, but many were covered with his notes. Again and again a phrase remembered, a thought treasured—because it revealed the man she had chosen as wise, and noble, and good, and therefore justified that choice and silenced any doubts she might have entertained regarding it—stood out as Mark's. Again and again she read some common-place, some compromise, some paragraph which rang false, slashed by Mark's red pencil. Once or twice she held up the sheets, examining closely the condemned passages; smiling derisively as she perceived the violence of protest

in the broad, deeply indented excoriations. Suddenly Dibdin appeared, bland but surprised.

"Shall I bring a lamp, M'm?"

"Bring me a basket, Dibdin, and then whistle for a hansom."

She put the sermons into the basket and went back to Cadogan Place, where a cold supper awaited her. The footman told the cook that his mistress had eaten nothing, but had called for a pint of champagne. The cook expressed an opinion that nothing in the world was so upsetting as a "move"; which turned everything and everybody upside down, and produced "squirmishy" feelings inside. Presently Betty's maid went upstairs, and returned with heightened colour. Her mistress, so she reported, was as cross as two sticks.

Betty, indeed, was pacing up and down her bedroom in a fever of indecision and unrest. The husband she had honoured was destroyed. The ghost of him inspired repugnance—a repugnance which found larger room in the new house. The pleasure she had taken in furnishing became pain, inasmuch as not a chintz had been chosen without the reflection that she was recovering what was dingy and discoloured in her life, substituting for the old and worn the fresh and new. And now, in the twinkling of an eye, her good resolutions, her hopes and aims, her readjusted sense of proportion—had vanished. She was in the mood to set ablaze that dainty room in which in fancy she had passed so many happy hours, to tear down and destroy the tissues through which she had looked out upon a future as rose-coloured as they.

She passed a sleepless night, got up feeling and looking wretched, gave her servants certain hasty directions, and drove to Waterloo. In her hand she carried a small bag containing the Westchester and Windsor sermons.

From Weybridge she walked to Myrtle Cottage, and the exercise brought colour into her cheeks. She was sure that she would find Mark in the shelter, so she approached it from the side of the grove, being unwilling to face Mary's clear and possibly curious eyes.

Mark was at his typewriting machine when she saw him, and as usual so absorbed in his task that he never perceived her. Betty reflected that he could not have approached her without her being aware of it, but men surely were fashioned out of clay other than what was used for women.

"Mark!"

He sprang up, with a startled exclamation, and came forwards, holding out both hands.

"What has happened?"

As he spoke her indignation began to ooze from her. Intuition told her that the expression upon Mark's face revealed intense sympathy. Her trouble, whatever it might be, had moved him to the core. Suddenly, a light flickered out

of the darkness. For the first time, she saw herself and him alone together, shut off from the world. It came upon her with a shock that she was glad that Mark, not Archibald, had written the sermon. Only he, the lover of her girlish dreams, could have found the words which had stirred her so profoundly. Mark repeated the question, ”What has happened?”

”You wrote this?” she cried, holding out the Westchester sermon.

He nodded, realising the fatuity of denial. For a moment they gazed into each other’s eyes. Then she said slowly—

”You wrote the ’Purity’ sermon?”

”M-m-m-most of it,” he admitted reluctantly.

”You have helped him ever since?”

”I have revised some of his work.”

”And I never guessed it,” she exclaimed passionately. ”If I had thought for a moment I must have known that it was you—you—you, not him. Oh, my God, I shall go mad! I married him because you—you had tricked him out in a garment of righteousness! Had you come forward at the eleventh hour and spoken I should have thanked you and blessed you. Why did you hold your tongue—why—why—why?”

”I thought you l-l-loved him,” he stammered.

”Loved him?” The scorn in her voice thrilled his pulses. ”I loved what he said, which was yours. Why did you not say it yourself?”

”Because,” his infirmity gripped him, ”I c-c-c-couldn’t.” Her face softened, and the lines of her figure relaxed.

”It is my fault,” she said, gazing at him through tears; ”I ought to have guessed.”

”Betty”—he had recovered his self-control, now that she was in danger of losing hers—”Betty, I have done you a wrong. I withheld the truth, because truth, faith, love had gone out of my life, blasted by—b-b-by——”

”By me?”

”No—n-n-no.”

”By whom?” He paused, and she continued vehemently: ”Mark, I want the truth. Nothing else is possible between us. What killed your faith? You have never answered that question. What changed you from the man you were to the man you are?”

”Hate.”

She recoiled at the grim word, recoiled, too, from the expression on his face.

”You hated—your brother?” The words fell from quivering lips. He saw that she was about to swoop on the truth he had hidden so long. He was impotent to avert discovery. She came very slowly towards him, her eyes fixed on his. The expression in them bewildered him. She raised both her arms and laid her hands

upon his shoulders.

”You hated him. Then you loved—me.”

”Always,” he answered. ”To me you came out of Paradise, and brought the best part of it with you.”

”Say it again,” she whispered.

”I loved you—always: as child, as boy, as man.”

She smiled piteously. ”As child, as girl, as woman I have loved—you. And yet loving me like that you could believe that I loved him. Ah, love is blind indeed.” She held him with her eyes and hands, speaking softly and quickly: ”And because you loved me you gave him what he lacked. That was like you. But did it never strike you that I might find out?”

”Not till too late. Betty, I have behaved like a fool. I gave him that sermon which I would have given my right hand to preach. But I had not foreseen its effect. Having given it, I could not take it back.” He went on to describe his breakdown, the scene with Ross and the doctors, the silence which he dared not break, his slow recovery, the renascence of his hopes and their destruction. A dozen times his stammer stopped him, as many times he was made aware that this abhorred weakness bound him the closer to the woman who loved him. When he had finished his story she looked up.

”What shall we do now?” she asked.

Above, the song of the pines rose and fell in melancholy cadence. The day was hot, and would become hotter, but here in this sylvan temple the air flowed in cool and fragrant currents. Mark was silent, reflecting that always he had known this hour would come. From the moment he had read Archibald’s letter announcing his engagement, Destiny, with the leer of some hideous gargoyle, had decreed that he should hate his brother and love his brother’s wife. Up to the present moment both passions had been controlled and confined. The unforeseen had turned them loose.

”What shall we do now?”

She stood before him absorbed in the love which at last had found expression. What else the world might hold for her was not.

So standing, delicately flushed, but with eyes which neither faltered nor fell beneath his, the daughter of Louise de Courcy awaited Mark’s answer.

”You are my brother’s wife,” he said slowly.

Betty shrugged her shoulders. The gesture, almost piteous in its shrinking protest, moved Mark more than any words she had spoken.

”If—if I asked you, you would come away with me?”

She nodded, meeting his passionate glance, facing, as he did, the issues involved. Her hands moved towards him—timidly, but with unmistakable invitation.

"Betty," he cried, "Betty!"

"Ah! you want me. You do want me—you do, you do!"

"Want you?" his voice broke. Instantly she had seized his hands, drawing him towards her. He held her firmly—at arm's length. In that supreme moment he was perhaps stronger than he had been ever before, inasmuch as the faith which once had fortified him was his no longer, and yet without it, believing in nothing, holding in derision God's law and man's, he resisted her, because he was counting the cost to her. Then, reading his thought, she inclined her head, whispering, "If there is a God, and if he bade me choose between life here with you and life hereafter without you, not being allowed to have both—do you know what I should say?"

"Do not say it," he entreated. His face was so twisted by the consciousness that he was taking advantage of her weakness that she thought he was ill. When he remained rigid, she added gently, "Let us go to some place where my love shall make up to you for every pang you have suffered."

"Stop!" he cried hoarsely. "Apart from our love, you have not considered what this means: to me, the man, nothing; to you the loss of everything which women hold dear. You must not decide rashly—you—must—take—time."

She laughed derisively.

"I will take anything you like, so long as you take me."

He caught her to him, closing her mouth with kisses.

CHAPTER XXXIV
CHARING CROSS

Betty returned alone to London before mid-day. Mark decided to follow by an afternoon train. They had agreed to meet at Charing Cross, to cross that night to Ostend. Then, in some remote corner of the Ardennes, they expected to make plans for the future. The "move," as Betty had pointed out, covered anything that might appear odd to the enlightened Dibdin. Her divided household would understand that she was going to a friend's house for the few hours during which her own bedroom furniture was being shifted.

Mark accompanied her to the station, returning home to pack a portmanteau. What doubts he had entertained were dispersed. He swore that he would look forward, never backward, and found himself whistling as he climbed the hill

to the cottage.

In the shelter, the first object that he saw was Betty's handkerchief lying in the corner of a chair. He picked up the small, square piece of cambric and put it to his lips. A faint essence reminded him that fragrance had come again into his life. Then he began to arrange his papers. When Mary came in to arrange the cloth for luncheon, he told her that he was going away for a few days. She expressed no surprise. Why should she? It lay on his tongue's tip to say: "I have been wretched: now I am going to be happy. Let us shake hands!" Watching her moving here and there he was sensible of an impatience, an irritability almost impossible to suppress. Mary subtly conveyed an impression of protest. He told himself that this was absurd. Suddenly her eyes met his.

"What have I done?" she faltered.

"Why, nothing," he answered.

"You were staring at me so queerly," she answered. "The business which takes you away is pleasant, isn't it?"

He smiled reassuringly.

"Connected with your work, I suppose?"

Her curiosity was natural. He always spoke of his work to her.

"No," he said shortly. "It is not. I dare say you think that I could not be really keen about anything or anybody outside of my work. If I told you——"

He closed his lips, wondering why the truth had so nearly leaked from them. His joy had expanded so quickly, that it exacted a larger habitation.

"I have nothing to tell yet," he said confusedly, "but I may write; you shall hear from me; I shall be frank—with you."

He fell into a reverie, as she left the shelter. In a minute she returned.

"There is a gentleman to see you, Mr. Samphire. Shall I bring him here?"

She handed him a card. A cry escaped Mark's lips.

"David!"

The card fell to the ground. For the moment he felt as if some icy finger had been laid upon his heart. He had not seen David since the Crask days. And he had told himself that this old friend had held sorrowfully aloof, because he had divined that intercourse between the faithful and the faithless, between Christian and pagan, would prove (temporarily at least) inexpedient and abortive.

"Please ask his lordship to come here," he said, frowning.

Mary glanced at his face and withdrew. Mark followed her with his eyes as she crossed the pretty garden between the shelter and the cottage. Not a cloud, he noted, obscured the soft azure of the skies; upon all things lay the spell of summer.

"Why has he come?"

Instinctively he armed himself for conflict. It was curious that he associated

the Highlander and his strange powers of second sight with the quiet English Mary. The impending fight would be two against one. Good would side with good, although evil might array itself against evil.

These thoughts flitted through his mind as David was advancing. Mark, summoning up a smile of welcome, met his friend, who smiled back, extending both hands.

”Mark,” he exclaimed, ”I am glad to see you. Thank God, you’re well.”

”And stronger than I ever was in my life,” said Mark. ”You’ll lunch with me, David. I must go to town this afternoon, but we can have an hour together.”

”I must go to town too,” replied David. ”You look a different man, Mark.”

”I am a different man.”

David followed him into the shelter and sat down, with a puzzled glance at his surroundings. During luncheon both men were conscious of a new and disagreeable sense of restraint.

”Have you another novel on the stocks?”

”Yes.”

David jumped up, eager, vigorous, impetuous.

”I have come a long way out of my road to ask you a question.”

”Ask it,” said Mark.

”When are you coming back to us?”

”Can God only be served in cassock and surplice?”

”You evade my question,” said David. ”Mark, I have had the feeling that you were in trouble: ill, dying perhaps. I—I had to come to you. But I find you a strong man, and ”—he glanced round at the pleasant garden—”and wasting time. Don’t mistake me! You have been working hard, no doubt, but at work which others can do as well. You have recovered your health and——”

”Go on.”

”The work God intended you to do is being left undone,” said David. ”Why?”

”If we are to remain friends, David, you had better not press this question.”

”If we are to remain friends, I must. You have resigned a stupendous responsibility—why?”

”Shall we say—incapacity to administer it?”

”Give me the true reason.”

”Can’t you divine it?”

”I have divined it,” said David, after a long pause. ”You sneer at a gift which is given to few; but you, of all men, ought to know that it has been given to me. And I have divined more. I know that you are on the edge of an abyss which may engulf you and another.”

”You have divined that?”

The sneer had left him; amazement, incredulity took its place. David must have heard some idle rumour. He asked him at once if it were not so.

"I have heard nothing."

"On your oath?"

"Certainly—if you wish it."

Mark paced the length of the shelter; then he turned and approached David, who was watching him. When less than a yard separated them Mark stood still and pulled his watch from his pocket.

"It is now two o'clock," he said. "At half-past six this afternoon I meet the woman I love and who loves me at Charing Cross. To-night—we leave England—together."

The relief of speech was immense, but with this, and dominating it, was the fierce desire to confront David with the truth, to invite his arguments, so as to trample on them.

David said hoarsely: "The woman is your brother's wife. You—you—Mark Samphire, the man I thought so strong, will do this shameful thing? *Impossible*!"

Mark laughed.

"I'm going to speak plainly, David. For the first and last time I mean to let myself r-r-rip!" He drew in his breath sharply. "You shall see me as I am. I appeal not to the Bishop, not to my old friend of the Mission, but to a more merciful judge than either—a man of flesh and blood."

He paused, frowning, trying to compose, to marshal his thoughts. Then he began quietly, exercising restraint at first, but using increasing emphasis of word and intonation as he proceeded.

"You say it is impossible that Mark Samphire should do this thing. Strange! You have intelligence, sympathy, intuition. Impossible! Oh, the parrot cry of the slave of convention and tradition, of the worshipper of his own graven images, bowing down before them, unable to look beyond the tiny circle wherein he moves and thinks. Impossible, you say? Impossible for Mark Samphire to run away with his brother's wife!"

"Incredible then," Ross interrupted.

"Incredible. It's incredible you should use such a word with your experience. Can't you realise that the same strength which made me struggle up towards what you call good or God is driving me as relentlessly down the other road? I am not the Mark Samphire of the Mission days, but the Mark Samphire who came from Ben Caryll knowing that if he had met his brother alone upon that mountain he would have killed him, or been killed by him. And having felt that, do you think I would stick at running away with his wife?"

His tone was so bitterly contemptuous that Ross could only stammer out: "I have never understood why such love as you bore him turned to such hate."

”Let your God answer that question. As man to man I swear to you that my brother’s extraordinary success in everything we undertook together, and my own failure, did not sour me. I grudged him nothing—except her. And I could have let her go to any other. I tell you, David, I’ve been tried too high. The irony of fate has been too much for me. A time comes to the stoutest runner when he falls. Then the fellows who have been ambling along behind trot past blandly complacent. They are not first, but they are not last. The man who might have been first is last. I fell at a fence too big for me—and I broke my neck. We’ve said enough, too much, about that, but the fact that I could love as few love ought to be proof to you that my hate would be as strong.”

Ross saw that he was trembling violently.

”If you had written to her——”

”If? That ’if’ is crucifixion. Yes; yes; if I had written one line, whistled one note, held up one finger—she would have come to me. But then hope had scarcely budded. My life was so pitiful, so frail a thing to offer. And, voluntarily, she had engaged herself to him. He had won her, as he had won everything else——”

”Fairly.”

”No. Not fairly.”

Briefly, but in vehement words, Mark told the story of the sermons, concluding with Betty’s discovery of the truth.

”And now,” he demanded, stretching out his shaking hands, ”do you see the real Mark Samphire? Is your finger on the pulse of a poor wretch who tried to do his duty and—here’s the rub, David—who was punished the more heavily on that account? If I had played the world’s game, Betty would be my wife. Archibald would be still minor canon of Westchester.”

Ross took the outstretched hands.

”My poor Mark,” he murmured.

”Thanks, David; but don’t pity me! I envy no man living. You have listened to my story, patiently. One thing more remains to be said. If Betty had not discovered the truth, I could have held aloof from her to the end. On her account, not because she was my brother’s wife, I respected the law. But now,” his voice was triumphant, ”she wants me. Do you hear? She wants me. I’m necessary to her. And because of that, and for no baser reason, I am going to her—to-night.”

Ross met his eyes.

”In a word,” said he, ”you refuse to protect the woman you love against herself?”

”Once, I should have used that very phrase. What an ocean flows between us, David!”

”In six months,” continued Ross, ”you and she will be tormented in a hell of your own making. There are men and women, thousands of them, who can

steep themselves in the life of the senses. You are not of them, Mark, nor ever will be; nor is she."

Mark smiled derisively.

"She and I," he retorted, "are two of the myriad insects crawling upon one of a million worlds. Something within both of us bids us make the most of our hour. We shall do so. You mean well, David, but you rack me—you rack me. Go!"

"So be it," said David.

As he was turning, Mark clutched his sleeve. An expression in David's eyes—the expression which refuses to acknowledge defeat, which indicates unknown resources—alarmed him.

"You are not going to Archibald," he said hoarsely.

David's face was twitching with emotion, but his voice was firm and even.

"You must know where I am going," he said simply. "I have failed—through my own weakness—as I have failed before, as I shall fail again and again, but I believe that He, whose help I am about to implore, will not fail. You will not leave England to-night."

When Mark looked up the speaker was gone.

During the next hour preparations for the journey occupied his attention. But after his portmanteau was strapped and a fly had been ordered to take him to the station, nearly an hour remained. Mark went into the grove and flung himself at length upon the soft carpet woven by the singing pines. He closed his eyes, invoking the alluring image of Betty. Instantly she came with outstretched hands and shining eyes, but between them, a grim and sombre figure, knelt David Ross, his face upturned in supplication. Mark found himself straining his ears to catch the words of the prayer, but they escaped, fleeting upward whither he dared not follow them.

Presently he seemed to hear voices other than David's, and like his inarticulate, although familiar. In his room at the Mission he had often listened to such voices. What man of ethereal attributes has not? But since that night on Ben Caryll these sounds had ceased.

He told himself, irritably, that once again he had fallen a victim to nervous imaginings, echoes of the material world rather than spiritual communications. Barger had told him that it was easy—given certain purely physical conditions—to hypnotise oneself, to sink into a subconscious coma vibrant with sensations and sounds subject to scientific analysis. But even Barger had never denied the transcendental gift of David Ross, even Barger believed firmly in the Seer of Brahan, whose predictions concerning the Seaforth Mackenzies had been verified so marvellously.

It was impossible to ignore the coincidence of David's visits. Twice David had sought him out, when he was in sore straits.

At whose bidding?

The question could not be exorcised by sneer or sophism. Mark had compared himself to an insect, a metaphor used ten thousand times by the agnostic school and properly, since none other is more expressive of the insignificance and ephemeral nature of man's body in relation to the universe. None the less Mark was aware that moral or spiritual facts, as a writer puts it, have no relation whatever to physical size, and that a man's soul can no more be measured with a yardstick than the cardinal virtues.

At whose bidding had David Ross been sent?

He travelled to London by a train which reached Waterloo just after five. As he neared the city his mood changed from one of doubt and perplexity to reckless satisfaction. The hansom which took him to Charing Cross passed over Waterloo Bridge and down the Strand, always crowded at that hour of the afternoon. Twice the hansom was stopped by the uplifted hand of a policeman. Each time it drew up opposite a bar to which thirsty souls were hurrying. Mark's ears could catch the sound of ice tinkling in long tumblers. Corks were popping intermittently. A woman's laugh rang out above the buzz of innumerable voices. Mark stared at the faces of the foot-passengers. Most of the men were returning from work. An air of relaxation informed them. The day had been insufferably hot, but now a breeze from the river was flooding the streets, deliciously cool, astringent, tonic.

The hansom turned in at the station gates, and a moment later a porter was asking Mark his destination. Mark gave the man instructions as he handed the cabby a florin.

"Thank ye, sir. 'Oliday times, sir."

"Yes," said Mark, smiling. All round him were men and women, hard-working Londoners, about to escape into the country or to the seashore after a year's unremitting grind. The great summer exodus was now at its height. Some of the humbler folk carried articles wherewith to beguile the leisure hours: musical instruments, shrimping-nets, spades and buckets, telescopes, and the inevitable hamper of food.

Mark, with time to spare after he had made arrangements for a coupé to Dover, caught the contagion of excitement and gaiety, and could enter into the feelings of an octogenarian who was renewing his youth by playing a penny whistle. Couples were numerous as birds in pairing-time. Mark looked at these with sympathetic interest. They drifted by, pair after pair, an eternal procession of Jacks and Jills. It struck Mark, not for the first time, that these couples were very youthful. And he felt that Betty and he shared their youth, that they had not waited too long. Presently a man of his own class approached, peering eagerly to

right and left, consulting first his watch, and then the great clock. Mark watched him and followed him. The man was excited and nervous. Suddenly his face brightened; he ran forward, with both hands extended. "You have come at last," Mark heard him say. A pretty girl, her face suffused with blushes, murmured something, and the man answered hoarsely, "If you had chucked me, I should have cut my throat." Then they passed, arm in arm, laughing and chattering, into the crowd and out of sight. Mark looked at his watch. In less than ten minutes Betty would be here; she also would blush and smile; her hand would be on his arm; and together they would pass out of the noise and confusion into sweet, secluded spaces beyond!

His train backed into the station, and passengers began to take their places. Mark made sure that his coupé was reserved for him, but he would not allow the porter to put his traps into it.

"I am expecting a friend," he said; and the porter grinned. He walked back to the trysting-place under the clock, one of half a dozen who had agreed to meet beneath it. Overhead, the great dial recorded the flight of time with inexorable, inhuman deliberation. Mark was fascinated by the minute hand, creeping on and on, nearing the appointed hour. Betty was running things rather fine, he reflected. In less than seven minutes the train would be despatched.

Five minutes more glided by. The discordant noises of the station fell like the boom of distant breakers upon an ear attuned to the sound of one voice which out of all the voices in the universe was now mute. The porter approached, anxious and insistent. Mark stammered out a score of questions. The porter shook his head dismally.

"She must come," said Mark harshly.

As if in derisive answer, the locomotive of the train about to start whistled. Doors banged. The long line of carriages began to move.

"'Ere she is," said the porter phlegmatically.

Mark turned with thrilling pulses. A woman had rushed up to him, out of breath and scarlet in the face. That she had missed her train, and was distressed inconceivably, no one could doubt; but she was not Betty. Mark could have struck her. She stared stupidly at the vanishing train.

"It's gone," she said.

"Yes," said Mark grimly.

He turned from her to meet the inquisitive stare of a messenger boy. The boy stared unblinking, and then said, "You're Mr. Samphire?"

"Yes," said Mark.

"I'm to give you this."

He held out a letter. Mark took it, broke the seal, and read it, unmindful of porter and boy, who exchanged glances and winks; then he turned to the porter.

”Put my things into a hansom,” he said in a dull voice.
”Yes, sir,” said the porter.
The boy took one more look at Mark.
”That was a knock-out,” he murmured to himself, ”a knock-out—sure!”

CHAPTER XXXV
CHRYSOSTOM RETURNS TO CHELSEA

Betty returned to Cadogan Place, conscious of an extraordinary buoyancy of spirit, of a gaiety even which made her demure maid stare. ”Getting out o' this dirty old house makes you laugh, ma'am,” she remarked.

”Yes,” said Betty; ”it makes me laugh.”

When the maid left the room, Betty sat down by the window which overlooked the gardens below, the gardens typical of such houses as the one she was leaving—conventionally laid out, fenced with sharply pointed iron palings, pleasure grounds wherein no person, out of their teens, took any pleasure whatever. Betty could see two children and a gaunt governess walking primly along one of the broad well-swept paths. One child, a nice fat little girl, escaped from bondage, hiding behind a bush. Betty could hear the voice of the governess calling to her, and then a sharp rebuke, as the truant came toddling back to the path.

”If my baby had lived——”

She put the baby out of her thoughts. If it had lived, she and the child might have remained inside iron palings.

Then, very deliberately, she faced the future. Her money was settled on herself. Mark and she could live where they pleased, as they pleased. If one place proved disagreeable they could move on and on; the world was wide.

She smiled happily and contentedly. Many women, at such a moment, would have been distraught by anxiety and fear. But Betty was gladder than she had ever felt before. Indeed, she was triumphant. She told herself that every instinct she had tried to suppress was vindicated gloriously. To such a proud, refined woman the memory that she had flung herself at Mark's head had been always a dire humiliation, the more so because she had never measured the width and depth of his feeling for her. She repeated the phrase, ”He has always loved me,” again and again, letting the sweetness of it linger upon her lips.

The inevitable sacrifice—the fact which Mark plainly pointed out that she,

the woman, had more to lose than the man—was acclaimed. Hitherto, love—whether love of niece for uncle, of friend for friend, of wife for husband—had exacted nothing from her. She had been extremely generous with her money, giving away far more than the tithe. But the signing of cheques had not included one genuine act of self-denial on her part. Whatever she had done had been accomplished without effort, without pain.

Her thoughts turned from herself to Mark. Immediately the smile faded from her face.

How cruelly he had suffered! And with what a pleasant smile, with how gay a laugh he had confronted ill-health, ill-fortune, and disappointment!

"I shall be so good to him," she swore beneath her breath. "I shall make it up to him—and I know how to do it."

Here, again, what had gone before might be reckoned as fuel for the feeding of love's flames. She was no green girl, but a woman who understood men, who could speak the right word at the right time, and had learned to hold her tongue.

"We shall be the happiest pair in the world."

Presently her eye fell upon the small bag she had carried to Weybridge. In it were the two sermons. She rose from her chair, hesitated a moment, and opened the bag. The sermons, she decided, must be locked up in one of the trunks she was leaving behind. The first sermon she had read the night before, but the second she had not read.

She looked at her watch. Then she picked up the Windsor sermon, and sat down to read it, because, reading it, she would hear not Archibald's voice, but Mark's.

The text met her eyes. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

She read no further. The MS. fell from her fingers, and rolled upon the carpet. Betty did not see it, because she saw nothing. The familiar room, the gardens below, the great city beyond, faded from her vision. Darkness encompassed her. And out of the darkness, like the writing upon the wall of Belshazzar's palace in Babylon, flared the words of the text.

Suddenly, with a violence of contrast which convulsed her, the darkness was dispelled, and she saw, even as Saul of Tarsus saw, a great light. If she read Mark's sermon, if she listened to the pleading voice of the priest, she would fail to keep tryst with the man, not because she feared for herself, but because this question could not be evaded: "Will my impurity prove a curse to him?"

Bending down, she picked up the sheaf of papers, and thrust them fiercely into the trunk, which stood open near the window. Then she sank back into the chair, covering her face with her hands....

So sitting, she was transported to the ancient, banner-hung chapel, wherein her husband had preached before his sovereign. But in the pulpit stood Mark, not his brother, and Mark as she remembered him long ago, the Mark of King's Charteris days, thin, pale, strong only in spirit; yet how strong, how valiant in that!

But he was mute, save for the pleading of the eloquent eyes. Beneath the spell of these Betty rose once more, and stood beside the trunk, staring into it.

Thus standing, she heard the clock in the tower of St. Anne's strike four. At that moment David Ross was praying for her and Mark, praying and believing that his prayer would be answered.

Betty picked up the MS., locked the door, fell on her knees, and read the sermon through.

She was still kneeling when the clock struck five. One hour had passed. Mark was nearing Charing Cross. She rose from her knees, and sat down to write a letter: an intolerably difficult task, which must be accomplished in a few minutes. She stared dully at the blank sheet of paper in front of her; then she wrote:—

"I have read your sermon, the one preached at Windsor. Because of that I cannot come to you, and I entreat you not to come to me. Mark, my best beloved, I tempted you. May God forgive me! And I know—I *know*, I say—that He has stretched forth His hand to save us. And He willed that your words—what is best in you—the greatest thing you ever did—should stand between us. I cannot lower the Mark who wrote that sermon to my level. Oh, Mark, will you curse me as faithless? Or will you know that it is not my wretched soul I seek to save, but yours—yours.

"As soon as this is sent off I shall go to a friend's till Archibald returns. I must tell him the truth."

Archibald Samphire returned from the Midlands to find a new house set in order and his wife awaiting him. He advanced to greet her with a warm word of affection and congratulation. But she held up her hand, and before the distress in her eyes he recoiled, astonished and dismayed.

Although Betty knew that the lapse from honour involved in preaching another's sermon was as nothing compared with the sin she had contemplated, still she felt that the charge against her husband must be dealt with first. In a few words she told him of the breaking open of his desk and the discovery of Mark's MSS. He exhibited no confusion, but his expression changed and in a manner so amazing that Betty let fall a sharp exclamation.

"I am glad you know," he said simply.

His voice, his face, his fine massive figure expressed relief. She repeated his words:

"You are glad that I know?"

She had made sure that he would excuse himself blandly, with dignity, looking down upon her; and she had told herself that his carefully chosen words would flood her with contempt, the stronger because her own speech would prove halting and unrestrained.

"Yes, yes. I was a coward. I meant to tell you: I swear it, but I couldn't." Then he repeated the phrase he had used to Mark: "God knows it has been a secret sore."

"Why couldn't you tell me?" she asked.

"Because the right moment for doing so slipped by me."

"You married me under false pretences."

"Eh?"

"You wooed me with Mark's words."

"Wooed you with—Mark's—words? I can't follow you."

And here he stated a fact. He had neither the ability nor the intuition to follow a woman down the tortuous path of her feelings and aspirations. But at this moment he became aware that something dreadful remained to be said. Betty's pale, haggard face, her trembling fingers, her panting bosom, revealed an agitation which communicated itself to him. Let us be fair to a man with inexorable limitations. He had always believed that Betty married him for love. And he too had married for love—and other things which he valued; but the other things without love would not have tempted him to a mere marriage of convenience. And marriage with Betty had seemed at the time and afterwards the one thing needful: rounding a life too square, lending colour and sparkle to a profession whose habit is sable. If at times he had been vouchsafed a glimpse of barriers between his wife and himself, he attributed these to difference of sex. But till this minute he had believed her love as much an inalienable possession as his name. There was no love in the face half turned from his.

"You can't follow me," she repeated slowly. "That is true enough. Years ago, when we were children—babies—I loved Mark, and he loved me."

"Paul and Virginia!"

"Yes, yes, Paul and Virginia."

"We all knew that. At one time I thought you would marry Mark."

"He never asked me," she replied, with blazing cheeks. "If he had, I should have married him, sick or well. I supposed that he didn't want me."

"Why, so did I."

She met his eyes fiercely.

"You swear that?"

"Certainly. Great heavens! You don't think that if I had thought otherwise I should have tried to supplant him. He went away and left the field open to all comers—Jim Corrance, Harry Kirtling—and me."

"I have done you an injustice," Betty faltered.

At this Archibald's sense of what was fitting asserted itself. "Come, come," he said, "I regret profoundly that I did not frankly avow those two sermons to be Mark's. I do not expect you to forgive me in a minute, but you are generous, sensible, and my wife. We must take up our lives where we left them less than a week ago."

"That is impossible," said Betty.

She felt a great pity for him. The blow must fall with hideous violence, shattering the man's just pride in what he had accomplished. His extraordinary success seemed of a sudden to be transformed into an immense bubble about to be pricked by a word.

And when the word was spoken, when he knew everything, Betty saw what Mark had seen upon the night that the baby was born—the collapse of a personality. The big man who was to fill Lord Vauxhall's Basilica dwindled into a boy with the puzzled, wondering eyes of youth confronted for the first time with what it cannot understand. Betty felt old enough to be his mother, when he stammered out: "You—*you* have done this thing?"

"I might have done it," she answered gently.

He broke down.

"I have lost my brother and my wife," he groaned. "my brother and my wife."

Instantly Betty realised what Mark had always known—the weakness of the colossus. And this knowledge that she was the stronger took the chill from her heart, restoring magically her moral circulation. Looking at him, she wondered how she could have blinded herself to his true proportions. She had deemed him a Titan!

"What are you going to do?" he asked presently.

"That is for you to say. If you choose to put me from you——"

He interrupted her.

"You would go to him."

"No."

He rose up and began to pace the room, glancing furtively at his wife, who never moved. Suddenly, seizing her arm, and speaking in a loud, trembling voice, he exclaimed: "Mark is dead—you understand that? Say it; say it!"

"Mark is dead," she repeated sombrely.

CHAPTER XXXVI
FENELLA

Mark went abroad immediately after the events narrated in the last chapter, and remained abroad for many months, trying to drown recollection of Betty in printer's ink. By a tremendous effort of will and unremitting grind he nearly succeeded, but at times he could see nothing save her face, hear nothing save her voice, feel nothing save the touch of her lips upon his. After these visitations he was beset by a Comus' crew of spectres: the innumerable disappointments of his life: *toute l'amertume et tout le déboire de mille événements fâcheux.*

However, Compensation ordained that his *Songs of the Angels* should please a certain section of the American public, and a substantial cheque crossed the Atlantic in a letter from Cyrus Otway, who asked for another novel. Mark had learned to use his pen (as Conquest once put it); but recognition—the acclaim of the multitude—seemed indefinitely remote. *A Soul Errant* appeared, and was pronounced by reviewers an admirable piece of work, but its sales were limited to a few thousand copies.

From George Samphire, Mark learned that Archibald and Betty had entertained royalty upon the occasion when the first service was held in the Basilica. Tommy Greatorex wrote: "Your big brother is booming Vauxhall's new neighbourhood, and no mistake!" From Betty herself came no word whatever. Archibald, so Mark told himself, had forgiven her, determined to preserve appearances, to keep the wife with wealth and beauty, to guard her zealously from the man who had tried to deprive him of so valuable a possession. Once again, hatred of Archibald consumed him. In his heart he knew that Betty was pining for one line—the generous "I forgive you. I understand." But these words he could not write. He believed that she had failed him, that she had lacked courage, and lacking it, had grasped the first excuse pat to lip and hand. It seemed incredible that a sermon should stand between a woman and the man she loved. Curiously enough, he could not recall a line of this sermon thrown off, as it had been, in a brief fever of excitement and enthusiasm. Again and again, he repeated to himself the beatitude, and wondered what he had found to say about it.

On his return to England he moved from Weybridge to Hampstead, where another shelter was built in a small garden overlooking the Heath.

Meantime, Mary Dew had married Albert Batley, and when Mark paid her a brief visit he found the bride beaming, obviously content with her lot, and very proud of her husband's success as a contractor. Mrs. Dew explained matters:

"You see, Mr. Samphire, it's like this: Albert Batley just worships Mary, and she makes him very comfortable. Tasty meals go a long way with men who have a living to earn in this cruel, hard world."

Just as he was leaving Mary said shyly: "I hope, Mr. Samphire, we shall hear of your getting married. If ever a gentleman wanted a wife to look after him, you are he."

Mark laughed; then he replied in his easy, genial way: "Yes, yes; if you had a twin sister, Honeydew, I should ask her to live up a tree with me."

Alone at Hampstead, he wondered whether a wife was waiting for him somewhere: a kind, sweet creature, who would teach him to forget. Drax had told him that, humanly speaking, he was now free from that insidious disease which spares so few of its victims. With care he might live out his three-score years and ten; he could marry—if he so pleased. And for the first time since his father's death, a balance, steadily increasing, lay at his bankers.

About midsummer he began his first play—a comedy, which had been simmering in his brain for many months. He showed the scenario to Greatorex, who was not encouraging.

"You've immense difficulties ahead of you. Your unknown playwright must write his play for one actor-manager, whose ability it illumines" (Tommy was quoting from an article of his on the modern drama), "and whose weakness it obscures. And your moral purpose must be disguised, so as to give the dramatic critic a chance to discover it. Personally, there's nothing I enjoy so much as discovering in a play something which the author never thought of. Now, then, having written your play, you must persuade your actor-manager to spend some thousands in producing it adequately. All said and done, I'd stick to novels, if I were you."

"I must write this play," said Mark.

He wrote it and rewrote it. Then he read it aloud to Greatorex, who pointed out many technical blunders. Not till the play was actable in every detail would Tommy pass it as fit to be sent the rounds.

And then followed interminable, heartbreaking delays and disappointments. Actors and actresses, with rare exceptions, keep plays for months without reading them, answer no letters, and unhesitatingly break all promises unpro-

tected by iron-clad contracts. Finally, the comedy, returned for the sixth time, was flung by Mark into a drawer and forgotten.

Next summer Mark read in his morning paper the announcement of a son born to Archibald. A son! It was enough that the fellow should desire anything, anything, for the object to fall into his grasp! Then, in a passionate revulsion of feeling, wondering how Betty fared, he hastened to Chelsea and furtively interviewed Dibdin, who assured him that his mistress was doing not only as well as, but better than, the doctor expected. Mark gave Dibdin a sovereign and instructions to report once a day by letter for three weeks. Dibdin, an old friend and as discreet as an archbishop, promised to write, volunteering the information that the baby was an "uncommon fine boy, a Samphire every inch of him." From Jim Corrance, later, Mark learned that Betty was likely to prove an adoring mother. Jim had seen her with the urchin. "She has changed," he told Mark, in his blunt fashion. "It's natural, I suppose; one couldn't wish for anything else; but the Betty of King's Charteris is out of sight. As for Archie—he looks patriarchal."

If Jim wondered why Mark never entered his brother's house, he was too shrewd to ask questions. Perhaps he guessed more or less accurately at the truth. A score of times, Mark was tempted to take his arm and tell his old friend everything. Betty, however, could not be betrayed; and speech with reserves, with abysmal silences, would avail nothing. But if he could have unburdened his soul, what a relief, what a balm it would have proved!

After writing some pot-boiling short stories and articles, he plunged into a second play, a tragedy, dealing with the inevitable surrender of woman to tradition and convention. In accordance with Tommy Greatorex's advice, this play was built up for Mrs. Perowne, an English actress-manager, who had recently returned from an enormously successful tour in the United States and Australia. Mark went to see her act again and again, fascinated by her methods, which were those of Duse, and by her vivid and extraordinary beauty. She had red hair, a milk-white skin, a Spanish cast of features, the spirits and inconsequence of a child, and amazing physical and intellectual activity. Mr. Perowne, an American, had divorced her after a very stormy year of marriage. Since, he had died.

This second play, *Fenella*, was written in a spirit compounded of recklessness and patience. Mark was reckless inasmuch as his money was nearly gone; patient, because the artist within him told him that he must make haste slowly. But at the back of this supreme endeavour, ever-increasing and all-absorbing, was the determination to achieve a success which would surpass that of his brother. Archibald and he never met, for Mark saw none of his old friends save Pynsent and Jim Corrance, but Archibald's name and fame were for ever in his ears. A great reputation is hard to make in England, or elsewhere, but once made it is easily sustained. The Basilica was crowded every Sunday morning. Mark slipped

in one day, wondering what sort of fare would be provided. He found it nicely flavoured to the palate of the town. Jim Corrance growled out, "Archie gives 'em easily digested food. Of course he hasn't time to prepare such sermons as that Westchester one. He's up to his eyes in parochial work. That's what makes bishops nowadays."

Mark saw Betty in her pew without being seen by her. She looked pale and thin, but not unhappy.

After the visit to the Basilica Mark worked even harder than before, although he worked in the open air, and with due regard for his health. If that failed again, he was conscious that he would be bankrupt indeed. Accordingly, he lived a life of Spartan simplicity, and played golf regularly with Jim or Tommy Greatorex. But *Fenella* obsessed him. He told Jim that he was glad the comedy had not been produced, because *Fenella* was stronger and better written. Tommy growled out protests and warnings: "*Fenella*, whose acquaintance I'm anxious to make, may prove an ungrateful hussy. For Heaven's sake don't pin your hopes to her petticoat!"

When the fourth act was nearly finished, Sybil Perowne appeared in a new play, an adaptation of a French drama, which had enjoyed a *succès fou* in Paris. Mark and Tommy went to see it and found an audience cold and indifferent. As they came out of the theatre, Mark heard a stout dowager whisper to her daughter, "My dear, I don't know what it means, but it's taken away my appetite for supper."

"There you are," said Tommy. "Beware, Mark, of tampering with the British playgoer's appetite for supper. This thing is too sad. It won't go. Ah, well, the shrewdest managers make abominable mistakes, and the most successful is the fellow who makes least."

"*Fenella* is sadder than this."

"Um!" said Tommy. "Sorry to hear that, my boy."

But when the tragedy was read aloud, Greatorex professed himself amazed. He jumped up excitedly.

"I believe you've found yourself, 'pon my soul! And Sybil is mad keen for a new play. Hullo! Phew-w-w!"

Mark had fainted.

When he came to himself he admitted that he had been unable to sleep for several nights. Tommy talked like a sage, advising moderation, but knowing—none better—that *Fenella* could never have been born without pangs. With his sense of the dramatic he perceived that Mark in his present condition would be likely to impress the actress, herself highly strung and emotional. The good fellow took pains to arrange an interview, obtaining permission to call and bring a friend.

”I’ve cracked you up as the coming novelist, who’s dying to make her acquaintance. I said in a postscript that you raved about her.”

”She is magnificent,” said Mark.

”She never reads plays. But you must corner her. Spar free! I tell you frankly she’s a slippery one. I was her Press agent for a season. If possible, I want her to hear all about her part before she hands the play on to that scoundrel Gonzales.”

Gonzales was Mrs. Perowne’s manager. Mark frowned when his name was mentioned. He had heard of Gonzales.

Mrs. Perowne made the appointment for three. At two Mark met Greatorex in his rooms. Tommy was in his oldest clothes and hard at work.

”I’m not coming,” he announced. ”Never meant to, either. Why, man, I should wreck your chance. Here’s a letter with a gilt-edged lie in it. Have you the play? Yes. Now, look here; leave it in the hall with your overcoat. Persuade her, if you can, to listen to the last scene of the third act. Don’t leave the house without giving her some of it, if you have to force it down her throat. She’ll respect your determination. Report here.”

”I c-c-can’t r-r-read it,” stammered Mark.

Tommy hit his desk so hard with his fist that the ink bespattered it.

”Mark,” he said solemnly, ”I am counting on your making an exhibition of yourself. Be sure to stammer, burst a blood-vessel, faint, have a fit, but stick to your job. Now—go!”

Mark was pushed out of the room by his friend. When the door slammed behind him Greatorex burst out laughing. ”He won’t stammer now, and he’ll read his play.”

Mark was shown by an irreproachable butler into a small room hung with silk and filled with Japanese furniture. The dominant note was the grotesque if not the monstrous. Everything—from the embroideries on the walls to the tiny carved figures in the cabinets—indicated the cult of deformity.

He was examining a bit of enamel when Mrs. Perowne came in, holding out both hands.

”Tommy’s friends are always welcome here,” she said graciously. ”That’s a nice bit—isn’t it? It’s not Japanese at all, but Byzantine, as I dare say you know.”

Mark confessed that he knew nothing of enamels. He sat down, glancing at his hostess, who was not unconscious of his scrutiny and surprise. Always, men meeting her for the first time off the stage were amazed at her appearance of youth. She braved the light from the window with impunity. Hair, complexion, eyes might have belonged to a maiden of twenty. But the mouth—her most remarkable feature—betrayed the woman of maturity. It was large, finely curved, and mobile. Her eyes were of a rich chestnut tint.

”You want to tell me about a play?” she said, with a low laugh.

”How did you d-d-divine that?”

”The expression of a man who has written a play is unmistakable. Well, I am in a charming humour this afternoon. What is the play about? *Â propos*—are you the famous Mr. Samphire’s brother?”

Unconsciously Mark winced.

”Yes,” he said shortly.

”Tell me about your play.”

”I c-c-can’t,” he said. For a moment he hesitated, feeling the lump rising in his throat; then some emanation from the woman opposite—a sense of sympathy—restored his confidence. His face—so plain when troubled—broke into a smile. ”It’s like this,” he continued: ”I hate to give you a synopsis of it. L-l-let me read a scene or two. You can make up your mind in a jiffy whether it pleases you or not; and if it doesn’t, I’ll go at a nod from you.”

”But I never listen to plays. Surely that wretch, Tommy, told you. I talk them over before they’re written. I’ve got someone coming in three-quarters of an hour to talk over an unwritten play. The hundreds which are sent to me to read are always passed on to Alfred Gonzales.”

Mark felt his confidence oozing from every pore. In another minute his hostess would be bored. At this ignominious probability his fighting instincts asserted themselves.

”I wrote this play for you,” he said slowly. ”I can’t see another woman in it at all. And somehow,”—he stretched out his lean, finely formed hands with a dramatic gesture—”somehow I seem to have gripped you, elusive though you are. Tommy says you’re a good sort. Be good to me—for ten minutes. The play’s downstairs in the hall. Let me fetch it. Shall I?”

”Yes—fetch it.”

He ran like a boy from the room. Mrs. Perowne got up, glanced at herself in a small mirror, and sat down in the seat which Mark had just left. The change was not without significance. Before, she had wished to be seen; now she wished to see. When Mark came back she said quietly: ”Begin at the beginning.”

At that moment Mark felt once more the accursed lump in his throat. His face contracted. The woman closely watching him rose and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

”You have an impediment of speech,” she whispered. ”Take your time. You have interested me. I like men who surmount obstacles. I’ll sit here till you can read your play. I’m going to mix two tiny cocktails, Martigny cocktails: mild as Mary’s little lamb.”

When she came back Mark was at his ease; she had ceased to be a stranger. He drank the cocktail, and began the first act. Mrs. Perowne lay back in her chair,

watching him with half-closed eyes. She never moved, absorbing in silence every word and intonation. When Mark had finished, she nodded gaily.

"The first act is capital. When will you come and read the others?"

"At any hour you choose—day or night."

"To-morrow at twelve then. You must stay to luncheon afterwards."

CHAPTER XXXVII

POPPY AND MANDRAGORA

Half an hour later Mark was describing what had passed to Greatorex, who listened with an odd smile upon his ugly, intelligent face: the smile which is typical of so much that is left unsaid, the smile of a knowledge and an experience which cannot be imparted. Greatorex had appetite for such food as Mark was giving him, and he demanded every crumb. While Mark was speaking the journalist smoked. The smoke ascended in fragrant clouds, melting into the thickening atmosphere of the room. It struck Greatorex, not for the first time, that the reek of good tobacco manifested all the things for which men strive and to which it would seem to be predestined that they should not attain. Greatorex asked himself what life would be without the fragrance of hopes and ambitions which float from us and vanish. And how stale, how offensive their odour becomes unless the windows of the mind be flung wide open!

"Mark," he said, dropping the end of his cigarette, "you are desperately keen on this?"

He meant his words to be taken as affirmation or interrogation, according to Mark's mood. He never invited confidences withheld.

"Yes," Mark replied.

"Why?"

When the eyes of the two men countered, a third person would have remarked in them an extraordinary difference in colour and quality. Greatorex had the onyx eyes of a gipsy, bright yet obscured by mysterious flickering tints, the eyes which conceal and so seldom reveal the thoughts behind them. Mark's blue eyes had that candid expression which pertains to children's eyes.

"Why?" Mark repeated the pregnant word. "I think you know why. I have failed in everything I have undertaken. I have pursued success as if it were a will-o'-the-wisp——"

”Which it is——”

”And if once I could hold it in my hand, if I could say to myself, I have it—it is mine—why then——”

He paused.

”You care so much for fame—you?”

”I ask for recognition, not because recognition is in itself a hall mark of success, but because without it labour would seem to be wasted. What is the use of a great poem, a great book, which remains unread? A gospel is no gospel until it is preached to thousands.”

”Don’t set your heart on this play being produced!”

”I *have* set my heart on that, Tommy.”

”If Sybil takes a fancy to you——” he paused.

Mark’s ingenuous stare was disconcerting. He continued lightly: ”I warn you that she may like you better than *Fenella.* It would not surprise me if she liked you rather too well.”

”Don’t be a fool,” said Mark angrily.

”If I could only be a fool,” Greatorex murmured. ”Depend upon it fools have the best of it. And they live, some of ’em, in the only paradise to be found on this planet. Well, I have spoken, I have warned you.”

Upon the following day Mark returned at the hour appointed to Mrs. Perowne’s flat. The butler, impassive as the Sphinx, showed him into the same room with its curious atmosphere of the East. In a few minutes the actress appeared in a *kimono* of some silvery tissue embroidered in gold, with her hair done *à la Japonaise*, and embellished with barbaric ornaments. Clad in this she became a part, and the greatest part, of the room. Looking at her, Mark felt ill at ease in his blue serge suit. At the same time he tried to measure the difference between the woman in the *kimono* and all other women whom he had known. Mrs. Perowne smiled, reading his thoughts.

”I am quite, quite different to all the others,” she said softly. ”I ought to have lived in the days of Herod Antipas.”

When she spoke of Herod, Mark remembered that she had Jewish blood in her veins. Her father had been a well-known English picture-dealer; her mother, a famous dancer, a Spanish Moor. Her Moorish ancestors, of whom the actress boasted, were Jews to the marrow, although living in Spain, outwardly subject to the faith of most Catholic monarchs. For generations these people had lived and died incomparable actors, sustaining from the cradle to the grave a rôle above which glittered the knives of the Inquisition. Mark began to understand that the woman smiling at him was natural, most true to herself, when playing a part—and yet beneath a thousand disguises throbbed the heart of the Jewess, the child of all countries and of none.

Mark read his play.

As he read it, he realised how poor an instrument lay in his throat. He was hoarse from a neglected cold, and his voice, though flexible, betrayed the effort made to control it. But the stammer spared him. To Sybil Perowne, familiar with and therefore slightly contemptuous of the arts of the elocutionist, this rough, uneven inflection and articulation had something of the charm of a disused viol or harpsichord, whose frayed, worn strings still hold jangled echoes of cadences melodic and harmonious long ago. She had the perceptions of the artist, and that feeling for art which is partly a gift and partly the result of patient training. Her perceptions enabled her to see Mark Samphire as he was, the man who had fought against odds; her feeling for art approved his work as the epitome and expression of that fight dramatically set forth in admirable English. At the end of the second act the reader looked up for a word of approval: "Go on!" she said. The climax of the third act provoked an exclamation at Mark's physical distress. She brought him a glass of champagne and insisted upon his drinking it. But he saw that her eyes were shining. He plunged into the fourth act and stumbled through it: every word rasping his throat. When he had finished she jumped up as Greatorex had done.

"I am a woman of impulse," she cried. "I will produce your play."

Mark stared at her, not believing his ears.

"You will p-p-produce it?" he stammered.

"Yes," she answered. "I don't say there's money in it; I don't say it hasn't faults and crudities; but I do say it's a play—and it pleases, it touches, it thrills—me."

She held out her hand. Mark had an intuition that she wished him to kiss it. He raised it gratefully to his lips.

"And now," she said gaily, "luncheon! I am famished. There is no sauce like emotion. That is why Spanish people eat so much at funerals."

At luncheon she asked a score of questions about his work and life.

"Last night," she said, "I read *The Songs of the Angels.* You have heard these songs yourself, eh? But—do you hear them now?"

She held his glance, faintly smiling at the colour which rushed into his cheeks.

"There are angels and angels," he said evasively.

"But, if I have interpreted your meaning, the angels you write about are heard only by the—shall I offend you if I say—the saints. You are not a saint?"

"Hardly," said Mark.

"But you might be," she murmured; "that is why you interest me"—she paused, sighed, and finished the sentence—"so much. I have never met a saint; I have never met a man who had the makings of a saint in him—till to-day."

Mark knew that she had challenged him.

"Out of the makings of a saint," he said curtly, "the devil fashions the greatest sinner."

"You believe in the devil?"

Mark shrugged his shoulders.

"The devil is 'evil' with a big D before it. I certainly believe in evil."

"I have to drag answers from you. Do you dislike this sort of talk? Perhaps you think me indiscreet, impudent; but I like to get my bearings. It saves bother. You can ask me anything—anything, if, if you regard me as a friend."

"I do," he said hastily; but he asked no questions.

"I don't quite understand you," she said slowly; "and of course you don't understand me. I am sure, judging from your book, your play, and—and your face, that you have an extravagant admiration for what you think to be good women. Is it not so? You needn't take the trouble to say 'yes.' And I'm only a good—*sort.* I have a sound body, of which I take the greatest care, and a sane mind; but I was born without a soul. *Enfin*, the conclusion is inevitable—for me—I do not believe in the soul but you do?"

"I did," he answered.

She offered him a cigarette, and lit one herself, as the Sphinx-like butler brought coffee and liqueurs. The luncheon had been very simple. Sipping her coffee, the actress began to talk of *Fenella.*

"You wrote the part, you say, for me; but you have drawn *Fenella* from life."

Mark denied this.

"You may have done it subconsciously, but you've done it. Now tell me, have you worked out the technical details? Have you estimated the probable expense?"

"I suppose the adequate mounting of it will be costly."

"Between three and four thousand pounds," said Mrs. Perowne carelessly.

Soon after he took his leave. The play remained in the actress's possession. No mention was made of terms. Mrs. Perowne had said that Gonzales would look it over. Greatorex expressed astonishment that the affair had come to a head so suddenly, and congratulated Mark; but he added that a contract must be signed as soon as possible.

"You don't think——" began Mark.

"My dear fellow, I know a poor devil whose first play was accepted six years ago. It has not been produced yet! Strictly between ourselves, I don't mind telling you that I'm the man."

"But if your lawyer——"

"I can't afford to make an enemy of the actor-manager who *still* has it! I blame myself; I had no contract. We'll prepare a corker for you. I take it that

you want nothing if the thing fails, and a fair profit if it goes—eh? Just so. When do you see the fascinating Sybil again? To-morrow. Have you made love to her? She expects it from every man. Not many disappoint her."

He laughed at Mark's confusion, and compared him to the infant Moses found by Pharaoh's daughter in the bulrushes. The friends celebrated the acceptance of the drama at a restaurant, and Mark made merry.

"You feel it?" said Tommy.

"Eh?"

"Success tickling the palm of your hand?"

"I shall mark this day with red, of course!"

"If we were in the West of America," said Greatorex, "we should paint the night as red as *la belle* Sybil's hair. This sort of thing has only a tinge of pink in it. Have you ever let yourself go, Mark? Of course not! There is nothing of the beast in you. You might kill yourself, or somebody else, but I can't fancy you on all fours."

They returned to the club, where some choice spirits were discussing art and literature in a fog of tobacco-smoke. But Mark, who joined them, saw no fog—only the sun, shining upon all things and all men.

"He's had a four-act play accepted," Greatorex explained. "There's no more to tell yet."

Several of the men shook Mark's hand. Glasses were replenished, fresh cigars lighted. Mark laughed as gaily as any, delightfully aware that he was receiving something—so to speak—on account, a few pieces of silver, cash down to bind a bargain. Some of his companions were celebrities. It seemed to him that for the first time he was of them as well as with them. These Olympians asked for his opinion, laughed at his jokes, approved his suggestions. The hours passed swiftly and pleasantly.

But walking home to Hampstead, beneath the stars, in an air purged by frost, his triumph dwindled to mean proportions. He considered the events of the day. Out of these, now become shadows for the most part, the face of Sybil Perowne stood out substantially: a fact to be reckoned with. He asked himself if he liked her. Was he attracted by her beauty and cleverness? No; these had not touched him. Yet he was attracted—and by what? A vision of the Japanese room revealed the fascination, so mysterious, so alluring to the imagination, of the occult. The sorceress beguiled the fancy of a man who had only cared for good women. He found himself speculating in regard to her. Doubtless the Sphinx-faced butler could tell some tales—an he would!

If he saw much of her, would he forget Betty? The child of the Moorish dancer gave poppy and mandragora to those who sought her.

He had made an appointment with Mrs. Perowne in the afternoon, but

in the morning, having nothing to do, he thought he would like to see Pynsent. Pynsent owned a queer old-fashioned house in Kensington. Mark rang the bell, which was answered by a delightful French *bonne*, who made the best omelette in the world and worshipped Pynsent. Certainly, Monsieur would be charmed to see his friend. Alas! yes; the dear studio in Paris had been abandoned. She, Francine, was desolated, but what would you? Monsieur Pynsent made gold in this detestable London instead of silver in enchanting Paris! So chattering, she conducted Mark to the big studio, which was found to be empty. The master had slipped out for a minute. Would Monsieur Mark sit down? Before he had time to smoke a tiny cigarette, his friend would be shaking both his hands. She gave Mark the cigarettes, the potent Caporal cigarettes, handed him the latest Paris paper, popped a log on to the fire, and bustled away.

Mark looked about him. The studio, simply furnished, bare of those tapestries and properties which most painters buy as soon as they begin to earn money, was, in short, a workshop full of ingenious appliances for obtaining curious effects of colour, light and shade. In the middle of it stood a huge oak easel. Several large canvases were turned to the wall. An open paint-box, a palette, a bowl full of the coarse, broad brushes which Pynsent used, told Mark that work was about to begin. Pynsent took few holidays. Work had become to him not a means to an end, but the end itself. But then such work as his was an end, an accomplishment, a victory. Finality distinguished every touch. Mark lit one of the French cigarettes, because he knew the fumes of it would bring back the pleasant days in the *Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie*. He wondered whether Pynsent—the least sentimental of men—smoked Caporal tobacco for the same reason. Possibly. But more probably because he was a man in a groove. One could not conceive of Pynsent with a butler and footmen. He lived now as he had always lived, regardless of Mrs. Grundy, who said tartly that the great painter was a pincher.

After a whiff or two, the *Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie* revealed itself as it appeared one morning when a couple of brother students were removing themselves and their belongings from one studio to another. Mark had lent two willing hands and a tongue which outwagged a terrier's tail. The students possessed a chest full of costumes. In these their friends had arrayed themselves. From several adjoining studios came other students and their models, all anxious to help—or hinder. Every article was carried in procession down the narrow street to the sounds of loud laughter, of banjo and mandoline, of drum and cornet, and of various songs. A diminutive Frenchman, beardless as a baby, had taken off most of his clothes and was sitting cross-legged in the middle of a large flat bath, which four of his friends were carrying, arm-high, down the street. The little man had robed himself in a rough towel; he wore a sponge-bag on his head; and he hugged to his bare chest an enormous sponge. All down the street, windows

were flung up. Everybody joined in the fun.

”*Une petite surprise pour Monsieur—et Madame*.”

The voice of the good Francine put to flight the joyous procession. Mark rose up, flung away the half-smoked cigarette, and saw Betty advancing into the studio. Francine hobbled away. She knew that Betty had married Mark’s brother.

”Betty!”

”Mark!”

”Don’t go,” said Mark, as she paused irresolute. ”Pynsent is painting you, I suppose. He will be here in a minute. I’ll go.”

”You never wrote,” she faltered.

”Was it likely? How is the boy?”

”I expected a word of—forgiveness. The boy is very well.”

”Is he like you?”

”Everybody says so.”

He was silent and very pale, whereas Betty’s face was suffused with delicate colour. He was trying to resist an overmastering impulse to take her in his arms, when he heard Pynsent’s step, and a moment afterwards his clear incisive voice.

”I am ashamed that I was not here to receive you, Mrs. Samphire. But I know you’d sooner talk to Mark than me. I’m painting her, Mark. You shall give us your opinion. I’ve not seen you for a coon’s age. What? Nonsense, my dear fellow. I can paint just as well while you’re here. You must stay as long as you possibly can. Mustn’t he, Mrs. Samphire?”

”Of course,” said Betty in her ordinary voice. Pynsent dragged a canvas across the studio and placed it on the easel.

”There,” said he, ”what do you think of that?”

Mark approached the easel, as Betty turned to remove her hat and jacket. The portrait, almost completed, was three-quarters length: a daring study in what at first glance seemed to be black-and-white. As a matter of fact, black, as pigment, was not used at all. The effect of it was produced by the admixture and contrast of colour. Looking into the translucent shadows the eye detected brilliant tints.

”It’s one of the best things I’ve done,” said Pynsent. ”It’s kept me awake nights, this portrait. I got that shadow under the chin by a trick I learnt in Florence. You lay three colours one on top of the other. It’s great. The fellow who discovered it can’t draw; he’d be a wonder if he could——”

Pynsent went on talking, unaware of what was passing in the minds of his friends. Betty sat down on the model’s dais, and Pynsent arranged her hands, still talking volubly of light and colour effects. Mark remained staring at the picture. ”You haven’t said what you think of it,” concluded Pynsent, as he picked up his palette.

”For whom are you painting it?”

”It’s an open secret, isn’t it?” said the painter, glancing sideways at his model. ”The grateful Vauxhall wishes to give it to your brother. But I had difficulty in persuading Madame to sit.”

”Vauxhall,” repeated Mark stupidly.

”Archie, they say, has put thousands into his pocket. He boomed the price of all bricks and mortar within a mile radius of the Basilica. Well—your opinion, my dear fellow.”

Mark still hesitated. Pynsent was famous for his delineation of character. He had the power of seizing and transferring to canvas those delicate shades of expression which reveal the real man and woman. In pourtraying Betty, he had emphasised the mother in her at the expense, possibly, of the wife. The portrait was hardly flattering in the generally received sense. The face was troubled; lines and shadows lay on it. Betty’s youth and beauty were subdued, as if beneath the touch of suffering rather than time. But the general effect remained that of a grace and loveliness independent of colour and texture. The admirable contours, the delicate modelling of cheek and brow and chin, indicated a noble maturity not yet attained but certain to be attained. Not at that moment, however, did Mark realise that Pynsent’s portrait was an incomparable likeness of the Betty who had failed to keep tryst because the higher nature had overcome the lower and baser. But he did grasp a part of the truth. He told himself that if Betty had not suffered, Pynsent would have painted another and a different portrait.

”The face is strange to me,” said Mark.

”What?” Pynsent exclaimed, staring at the speaker. ”You, you say that? Why of all men, I——” He broke off abruptly, sensible of some psychological disturbance, puzzled and distressed. Mark laughed harshly. He had almost betrayed himself. Then he glanced at Betty. Her likeness to the picture was extraordinary.

”You m-m-misunderstand me,” he stammered. ”I meant to say that you had painted a woman who has changed. We all change. I hardly recognise my own f-face. This picture is, as you say, the b-b-best thing you’ve done, and I congratulate you warmly. I’d like to see it again. But now I must r-r-run away. I d-dropped in to tell you that my play is accepted.”

This piece of news effectively cloaked his nervousness. Pynsent and Betty expressed their pleasure and congratulation. Mark shook hands and escaped.

”I thought he was not himself,” said Pynsent, picking up his palette. ”This will make up for a good deal, won’t it? I know exactly how he feels. Great Scott! It seems only yesterday that I had my first picture hung in the Salon. I was skied, but I was the happiest man in Paris. All the same, Mark did not strike me as looking happy—eh?”

She answered his sharp ”eh” and still sharper glance with a constrained

”N-n-no.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII
GONZALES

Mark plunged into the obscurity of the underground railway, cursing the impulse which had taken him to Pynsent’s studio. Betty had suffered, but what was her suffering compared with his?

He repeated this to himself again and again, as the train bore him eastward. Then he remembered Jim’s phrase: ”Our Betty is out of sight.”

Thinking of Jim, he got out at the Mansion House and walked to the Stock Exchange. Five minutes with Jim might blow some cobwebs out of his mind. He reached the huge building and called for James Corrance. The porter bade him wait near some glass swinging-doors through which hatless men were continually passing. Whenever these opened a dull roar of many voices fell on Mark’s ear, a menacing growl as of an angry beast. In his present mood Mark welcomed any strange noise as a distraction from the buzzing of his own thoughts. This beast of the markets made itself heard. Mark wondered vaguely whether it drowned, to such men as Jim, all other sounds.

While he stood, peering through the glass doors, a sharp thud, as of a mallet striking a panel of wood, smote his ears. In an instant, as if some wizard had waved a wand, silence fell upon the crowd within the building, a silence inexpressibly strange and awe-inspiring. Again the thud was heard, louder and more articulate. Mark guessed what was happening. A member of the Stock Exchange was about to be ”hammered.” The silence, Mark noted, was partially broken by a shuffling of innumerable feet, as men pressed forward to catch the name of the man who had failed. The hammer struck for the third and last time. Mark could see that every face was turned in one direction; upon each lay a grim expression of anxiety. Then a hoarse voice said in a monotone: ”Mr. Caxton Bruno is unable to comply with his bargains.” A roar of voices succeeded the announcement, as the crowd resumed the business of the minute. The glass doors swung open; and Jim Corrance appeared.

”You heard poor Bruno hammered,” he said. ”Dramatic—eh? It always thrills, because one never knows. That cursed hammer may sound the death knell of a dozen firms. I *am* glad to see you——”

Talking volubly, he insisted that Mark must lunch with him, although Mark protested that he had no appetite. But Jim, when he heard that *Fenella* was accepted by Mrs. Perowne, declared that a bottle of champagne must be cracked. He carried Mark off to his City club, where scores of men were eating, drinking, and talking. Jim pointed out the celebrities.

"That fellow is a famous 'bear,'" he indicated a short, thick-set, rather unctuous-looking Jew. "In the long run the 'bears' have the best of it."

"He doesn't look clever," said Mark.

"Clever? He's stupid as an owl outside his own special business. It isn't the clever ones who arrive. I know men with all the qualities essential to success, but the luck goes against 'em every time. They ought to get there with both feet, but they don't. You must have a glass of that old cognac, Mark. A play is not accepted every day, by Jove! I tell you what I'll do, my boy. I'll give a dinner in honour of the event. We'll get Pynsent, and Tommy Greatorex, and the rest of 'em. Why not nip over to Paris for it? Eh? What are you mumbling? All take and no give. What infernal rot! Well, I won't take no. As if it wasn't an honour to entertain so distinguished a gentleman."

Mark's spirits began to rise. After all, the world was not such a bad place. And the luck which Jim spoke about had certainly changed. The play would be produced within the year. Thoroughly warmed by Jim's hospitality, and promising that he would reconsider his refusal to dine in Paris, he left the City to keep his appointment with Mrs. Perowne. But the atmosphere of the underground railway, raw, fetid, thick with smoke, brought back the misery and despair of the morning. He found himself reflecting that life after thirty was an underground procession, a nauseating vagabondage in semi-obscurity, stopping now and again at stations artificially illumined, garishly decorated, reeking with abominable odours, crowded with pale, troubled strangers jostling each other in their wild efforts to hurry on to some other place as detestable as the one they were leaving....

As for the play upon which so much was staked, was he not a sanguine fool to take a woman's word that it would be produced? And production did not mean success. But here he paused. Production to him did mean success. It was good, good, good! It had thrilled two persons who knew. Greatorex, the cynic, the reader of innumerable plays, and the actress, the woman of genius.

On this occasion Mrs. Perowne received him in her drawing-room: a conventional room, white-and-yellow, filled with absurd knick-knacks and too many flowers, principally exotics of overpowering perfume. She was wearing a large hat which overshadowed her face. Her dress and jacket of the plainest cloth and cut were trimmed with sable. Mark had passed her brougham, drawn up a few yards from the entrance of the building, and guessed that she was going out. She

began to speak about *Fenella.*

”Alfred Gonzales has read it.”

”What does he say?”

”He finds it too serious. He says there’s no money in it.”

Mark gasped.

”But Alfred is not infallible,” she added. ”I mean to produce *Fenella.* It may be wise to throw it first to the dog.” This meant a first performance in the provinces. Mark burst into excited speech.

”Then you d-d-don’t mean to ch-chuck me. You’ve raised me to the heights, Mrs. Perowne. Don’t drop me! I m-m-mean that I’d sooner know the worst now. You said you were an impulsive woman. Perhaps your impulse overstepped the b-b-bounds of prudence, you know. And, if so, we’ll call the thing off. But don’t drop me later. I couldn’t stand that. Am I speaking out too plainly? You’ve been very kind, very kind indeed; I shall always be grateful, b-b-but I can face disappointment better now than l-l-later.”

”Sit down,” she said, smiling. ”Why, what a boy you are. I-I like boys.”

He sat down, trembling, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

”You are as emotional as I am,” she murmured in a caressing voice. ”Now, I’ve an appointment which I must keep. You can believe that I’d sooner spend the afternoon with you. I really mean it. I have to recite at a bazaar. Which bores me horribly. Now do you believe that I am your friend, that I like you, that you interest me? And will you be furious if I add that I like you better than your play—good though it is? I prefer the man to his work, the artist to his art.”

She paused, glancing at him through half-closed eyes. There was something feline about her expression and pose. Her voice had a purr in it. Mark did not know what to say or do.

”I should like to help you to a real success,” she continued. ”And why not? Your play might be made into a masterpiece. At present it is uneven, amateurish, crude in parts. Alfred put his finger on the weak spots. He says that the fourth act ought to be rewritten. Shall we rewrite it together? I mean, will you let me help you to make it just what it ought to be?”

”Why, of course,” said Mark eagerly. ”I am not fool enough to suppose that the thing can’t be improved. Your help, your hints, your experience would be invaluable. I was counting on them at rehearsal.”

”But we haven’t come to that yet. I don’t hold with altering plays at rehearsals. After the first night or two, revision may be expedient. One never knows. Scenes may drag, or they may be too short. We needn’t go into that now. But my point is that the thing should be as perfect as the author can make it, before it is read to the company. You agree with me—*hein*?”

The foreign word of interrogation had a soothing sound. Mark placed him-

self in her hands unreservedly.

”I trust you,” he said simply.

She nodded, showing her lovely teeth in a smile. Then she pointed out that nothing could be done till the piece in which she was acting had been taken off. She expected to be quite free in a fortnight’s time. After Easter she would appear in a rôle which required little preparation. During Lent she might go abroad. But all details could be settled later. Would he drink tea with her and talk everything over the day after to-morrow?

He saw her into her brougham.

”Your play is in Alfred’s hands,” she said, as she bade him good-bye. ”He is going to make some notes for us. Have you met him? Go and see him. He’s at the theatre now.”

She murmured something he did not catch, as the brougham rolled silently away. She was right. He ought to see Gonzales. The business connected with the play, the contract and so forth, must be done through him. Doubtless that was what she meant when she urged him to go to the theatre. He took a ’bus to the Alcazar and sent up his card. Presently word came down through a tube that Mr. Gonzales would be disengaged in less than ten minutes. Mr. Samphire might care to look over the house? Mark assenting to this, a youth connected with the manager’s department escorted him through the building, which had been built for Mrs. Perowne ”regardless of expense,” as the youth said, and ”replete with every modern appliance.” Mark wondered at the beauty of the decorations in parts of the theatre other than the auditorium, where lavishness was to be expected. The stage was already set, and the youth told Mark that the ”Empire” furniture had adorned the palace of one of Napoleon’s marshals.

Further details, setting forth the thousands lavished upon scenery and costumes, gave Mark a dismal impression that the play itself was the least part of a modern theatrical performance; this impression was deepened when he met the manager, whom he disliked at the first glance. Gonzales, it was said, had lured Mrs. Perowne from her husband, holding out the bait of fame. She first appeared in one of his adaptations from the French, a melodrama built about a head of red hair. Mrs. Perowne’s red hair had been the feature of posters six yards long, designed by Cheret. In America, the yellow press had asserted that Gonzales was in the habit of dragging his pupil across her room by her flaming locks. Her screams echoed from Maine to California, and filled every theatre with curious crowds, who believed the stories when they saw the red hair.

Gonzales was big and burly, with a close-clipped black beard, through which protruded a red lower lip. His face indicated power, cruelty, and a brutal self-assurance. He was smoking a very thick cigar, which he held, when he spoke, between white, fat fingers. His voice, however, was charming; melodi-

ous, persuasive, with the intonations and inflections characteristic of the Latin races; and his eyes, heavily lidded, were finely formed and of a clear umber in colour. He began to praise Mark's play with an insincerity which revolted. Mark, sensible of an overpowering desire to escape, listened to interminable phrases.

"You are soaping the ways," he said, when Gonzales paused. "I understood from Mrs. Perowne that you saw no m-money in the thing. You can tell me frankly what you think of it. I am not thin-skinned, and I hope you d-don't take me for a f-fool."

Gonzales showed his teeth.

"One has to be careful with authors," he said. "I write myself, trifles," he shrugged his shoulders, "adaptations, as you know, which have had a measure of success. And I can't bear to have them criticised, these adopted children of mine. I think them perfect, perfect. But you—you are of colder blood—and you say you prefer the truth which I speak sometimes," he smiled disagreeably. "Well, then, in my opinion, you have just missed a big thing. There's dramatic power in every line of *Fenella*, and in Paris it might catch on, but here tragedy is played—out. Still, I don't say that with judicious cutting, and a slight strengthening of the love interest, and—in short I told Mrs. Perowne that we could make something of it, if you gave us a free hand. Oh, there's plenty of action, and a freshness of treatment, but look here——" He made a couple of suggestions, so admirable, so luminous of his insight into dramatic possibilities, that Mark admitted at once the man's cleverness and knowledge of what was good work. But when he had, so to speak, given this sample of his ability, he added with an odious sneer: "After all the public, our public, asks for something absolutely different. For example, I am in treaty now for a comedy in four acts. Mrs. Perowne will wear eight dresses, furnished by the four leading dressmakers of Paris. *Entre nous*, these confections will cost us nothing, not a *sou*. They will be an immense 'ad' for the dressmakers and for us. The comedy must be constructed round these dresses. As an artist I deplore such methods, but a successful manager is forced to employ them."

Mark curtly stated the object of his visit. Gonzales shrugged his shoulders.

"The contract? Is it not early to talk of that?"

Words flowed like a stream of milk from his mouth. In the "profession," he explained, one could not move in haste. Mrs. Perowne had engagements to be filled. It was absurd to talk of producing a play on a certain day. It was bad business to take off a paying piece. And Rejane might lease the Alcazar. No, no, he gave Mr. Samphire credit for a certain delicacy. He was dealing, remember, with a lady, whose judgment—the truth was best—he had taken by storm. As her manager, he had implored her again and again to read no plays till he, the speaker, had looked them over. Finally, Mark took his leave, conscious that he had been defeated, that this man of many words could warp him to his will. He

carried away with him, moreover, a conviction that Gonzales was his enemy, and that the stories about him and Mrs. Perowne were true.

CHAPTER XXXIX
AT THE MIRAFLORES

During the fortnight that followed Mark saw Mrs. Perowne every day. The actress exercised over him strange powers of attraction and repulsion, which he tried to analyse: sensible that the repulsion was subtle and negative, whereas the attraction was obvious and positive. She had a score of charms; but beneath them lay something secret and hateful; possibly a cruelty not alien to red hair and red lips. By chance, one day, Mark said that strong smelling-salts held beneath the nose of a bulldog would make him relax his grip of another dog when more violent measures had failed. The actress had a Chow for whom she expressed extravagant affection. Before Mark could interfere, she had called the dog to her side and thrust beneath its sensitive nostrils some strong spirits of ammonia. The poor animal snuffed at them, and was almost strangled by the fumes. Mark, furious at such unnecessary cruelty, made hot protest and then got up to leave the room. Mrs. Perowne entreated forgiveness, pleading ignorance and thoughtlessness. Mark saw tears in her eyes; suborned witnesses, no doubt, but deemed honest by an honest man.

"I loathe cruelty," said Mark.

"Gonzales is cruel," she replied irrelevantly.

"But you like him?"

"I hate him—sometimes."

He divined in her a desire to talk about Gonzales.

"I hate him always," said Mark. "I don't want to hear his name mentioned. I know he is a beast."

"Would you like me to dismiss him?" she asked softly.

He stared at her in astonishment.

"Could you? I understood that he was in—indispensable, as actor and manager."

"No man is indispensable to—me," she said angrily. Then her face changed and softened, suffused by an extraordinary radiance of youth and vitality. "I mean to say," she murmured, "that no man, *yet*, has proved himself indispensable, but—

—"

She looked at Mark, who got up and began to pace the room, much agitated. Her lips were parted, revealing the small, white, resolute-looking teeth. She was reflecting, not without a sense of humour, that Mark was the first man of the many she liked who refused to dance to her piping. The fact allured her.

"I must go," he said abruptly.

"But you will come to-morrow?"

He hesitated, blushing like a girl, but on the morrow he came and found her friendly, genial, the "good sort": a rôle she could sustain to perfection. Mark, on the other hand, felt himself to be dull and irritable. Even the all-absorbing *Fenella* failed to quicken his wits or pulses. He answered absently some suggestions in regard to the fourth act, staring at the speaker's eyes, as if trying to read their message instead of that of the lips.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked in a tone absolutely free from sentiment.

"I am trying to find the real Sybil."

"Sybils are mysteries," she said lightly. "Besides you come here to talk about the play—*hein*? not about me."

"I come here to talk about the play," he answered slowly, "but I go away to think about you."

"And the thoughts are not always pleasant ones?"

"Not always."

"You are truthful."

"Am I?"

"Most men are such liars. Gonzales, for example—ah, well, we won't talk of him. But the others—oh, the humbugs!"

In fluent, even tones, she began to speak of the men she knew intimately, the higher Bohemians of art and literature. It was impossible not to be amused by her sketches.

"This is caricature," said Mark.

"Studies from life."

"I'm glad I don't know those—gentlemen."

"You are a man of limitations; and you see others not as they are but as you would like them to be. That is why your books do not sell. Your characters are strongly drawn, but their strength is a reproach and an exasperation to readers of weaker clay. In books, as in real life, we like to meet people no better and perhaps worse than ourselves. You are handicapped by ideals, which bankrupt your ideas...."

On this theme she spoke volubly for some minutes. Mark listened, amazed at her perceptions, at her grasp of life as it is lived in London, at her audacity in

dealing with problems.

”You look astonished,” she concluded, ”but nowadays revolt is a synonym of intelligence. As for me I revolt against stupid traditions and conventions. They are to me like those hideous horse-hair sofas and chairs upon which our grandfathers sat so stiffly. What? Good wear in them? I dare say they served their purpose, but now they are banished to obscure lodging-houses.”

Mark repeated some of her phrases to Tommy Greatorex.

”She’s as clever as she can stick,” Tommy admitted, ”but it’s surface cleverness, like surface water, tricklings from a thousand sources more or less polluted. She’s interested in you because you are different from—the others. Of course you’re not interested in her—apart from her profession, I mean. I sent you to her because I knew you would be proof against her sorceries—the witch. Hullo!”

Mark was scarlet.

”I say—you’re not interested, are you? She’s a wrong ’un. I warned you.”

”She has good in her.”

Greatorex laughed.

”Good? A needle in a haystack. Seriously, Mark, you mustn’t burn your fingers. Lord! I was so sure of you. I foresaw that you would excite her curiosity and interest; I knew that she would like you, as I said, better than your play. In a word I pulled the strings, but I thought I should make her dance, not you.”

”She has been very kind to me.”

”What have you been to her? Tell me to mind my own business, if you like. It’s not worth minding, but that doesn’t matter.”

”I am going to ask Mrs. Perowne to marry me,” Mark replied slowly.

”Phew-w-w!”

Instantly, Mark took his hat and marched out of the room. Tommy bit his nails till it occurred to him to light a pipe. Then he tried to continue his work, a special article, but he found it impossible to write a line. Mark’s face and eyes disturbed him. Finally, he flung down his pen in a rage.

”I thought I knew him,” he muttered, ”I thought I knew him. This is the bottomless pit, and I led him blindfold to the edge of it.”

Suddenly he bethought himself of Pynsent. Pynsent knew Mrs. Perowne, had painted her portrait—a revelation of character in colour. Accordingly he wired to Pynsent, asking him to dine at a small restaurant in Baker Street, and mentioning that a subject of importance was to be discussed. Pynsent wired back an acceptance for the same evening, and the men met at eight o’clock. They sat down to sharpen their appetites upon some excellent salted fillets of herring. Not till the *marmite* was swallowed did Greatorex give his perplexity words. Then he said abruptly—

”You painted Mrs. Perowne?”

”You bet I did—inside and out.”

”Did she make love to you?”

”N-n-no,” Pynsent replied, not quite readily.

”Why not be frank? I can hold my tongue.”

”I think,” Pynsent admitted cautiously, ”that she expected me to make love to her, but I didn’t. I took a dislike to the woman. And it came out in the picture. Unpleasant things were said about it at the time, but she liked it. She told me I had succeeded. And—Great Scott!—so I had.”

”She has captivated and is captivated by Mark Samphire. He is going to marry her.”

”What?”

”It is partly my fault, but I was so sure of—him.” He told the story at length. ”And now what are we to do?”

”Mark—Mark!” Pynsent kept repeating stupidly. ”It is incredible. Mark Samphire—and Sybil Perowne!”

”She has never denied herself anything.”

”She’ll suck every ounce of good blood from his body. It would be kindness to knock him on the head.”

”It would be pleasure to knock her on the head,” said Tommy gloomily.

”We can do nothing,” said Pynsent, at length, as he lit one of his Caporal cigarettes, which he smoked between the courses. ”There was Maiden. When I studied at the Beaux Arts, Maiden was the coming man. By Jove! he had come. I remember his big picture in the Salon of ’79. Crowds stood in front of it, jabbering like monkeys. It was great, great. And France bought it. It hangs in the Luxembourg to-day. Well, Maiden had a model, a queer little devil of a girl with huge black eyes whom he stuck into all his pictures. He bought her from her mother out of a slum, the Rue du Haut-Pavé, close to the cabaret du Soleil d’Or, and she followed him about like a spaniel, all over Normandy and Brittany. We wondered what would happen when the child became a woman. Gad! we might have guessed for a year and a day and never hit the truth. Maiden married her! He, the wit, the scholar, the gentleman, married that guttersnipe. And he hasn’t painted a picture for fifteen years! I tell you, Tommy, that it’s impossible to predict what any man will do when he comes in contact with the wrong woman.”

”Or with the right one,” said Greatorex, frowning.

They drank their coffee, and by mutual consent went to the Miraflores Music Hall, feeling that anything which might distract their thoughts from Mark would prove a relief. The place was crowded as usual, and Pynsent, pulling out a pencil, began to draw heads upon a piece of paper placed in his hat, while Tommy watched his facile fingers, much amused by the remarks which punctuated every line.

"People must relax," the painter was saying. "These places would be empty if we lived normal lives. A self-respecting savage would be bored to death here."

"True," said Tommy. "If you want to find sense nowadays you must hunt for it in the South Pacific, in the islands which Captain Cook and Mr. Thomas Cook did not find. Hullo, there's Jim Corrance."

"Why not tell him," said Pynsent quickly. "He's Mark's oldest friend; he'd do anything for Mark; and he's a practical sort of chap, too."

Jim joined them with alacrity, obviously glad to see Pynsent, who, of late, had dropped out of his file. The three secured a table in the corner of the foyer, where they could talk without fear of being overheard, for the noise—the shrill laughter of the women, the deep notes of the men, the blare of the band—was deafening. Jim, however, not knowing Mrs. Perowne, save by reputation, was unable to realise the gravity of the situation.

"Aren't you fellows making a mountain of a molehill?" he asked. "And, besides, what can old Mark offer Sybil Perowne?"

"A new sensation," said Tommy grimly. His face impressed Corrance. Pynsent nodded gloomily.

"There's David Ross," said Jim.

"The Bishop of Poplar?"

"At one time Mark and he were hand-in-glove. He used to be a wonder-worker."

"Oh, he is still," said Greatorex. "I thought we should get something out of you, Corrance."

"But a parson——" began Pynsent doubtfully.

"He was the amateur middleweight champion before he took Orders," said Corrance, "and it's the pugilist in him, not the parson, which has made him the man he is. He'll tackle Mark, never fear. He tackles me—periodically, but all the same, if this thing is serious he will accomplish nothing."

"That is what I say," Pynsent added.

But Tommy, the smallest and weakest of the three, doggedly persisted. Finally he persuaded Corrance to seek out the Bishop of Poplar. Having extracted a promise to this effect, he took leave of the others, for his article, due on the morrow, had to be finished that night. Pynsent and Corrance remained together. As the little man plunged into the crowd, Pynsent said: "Tommy Greatorex would cut off his right hand for Mark, but I've heard men call him selfish and self-centred."

Corrance at once began to analyse this indisputable fact, sticking out his chin, and talking with an aggressive frankness which much amused the painter, who said presently:

"We may as well admit, Jim, that we're cold-blooded, you and I——"

"For the sake of argument—yes. Go on!"

"Partly because of that we've succeeded. I can't see myself, or you, my boy, chucking our work to help others, although after the work was done we might write a cheque—eh?"

"You had better have another whisky and potass."

"Thanks. I will."

They watched the Miraflores ballet from a couple of balcony stalls. Fabulous sums had been spent upon the costumes of the dancers, who represented flowers and butterflies. Pynsent became absorbed in the spectacle of light and colour and movement. Now and again he jogged Corrance with his elbow, calling his attention to this effect and that, muttering inarticulate exclamations. The lights in the theatre were turned low, so that the stage, a blaze of golden splendour, attracted all eyes. Then, suddenly, like a sun in eclipse, the stage itself was obscured. One saw luminous shadows through which floated spirits of the air, mysterious winged beings; the butterflies seeking the flowers at the approach of night. Impenetrable darkness succeeded as the band stopped playing. In the foyer, men and women crowded together craned their heads in one direction, awaiting the supreme moment. It came. Out of the darkness glided a dazzling creature, veiled in what seemed to be a tissue of diamonds. From her alone emanated light, a myriad sparkles. She advanced slowly with white, outstretched arms, a smile upon her face. At the edge of the stage she poised herself for flight. Not a sound broke the silence, but one felt the throb and thrill of a thousand hearts. Then a faint strain of music suffused the air, as the creature took wing. She soared upward and forward, following the curve of an ellipse. Thus soaring, she scattered flowers which fell everywhere, filling the house with perfume. In the dome of the building she vanished. A sigh of pleasure escaped the lips of the spectators. The vision reappeared, gliding forward as before out of obscurity. Once more, for the last time, she soared upward and vanished.

"Let us go," said Pynsent. "That was the immortal spirit of Love. And she vanished—no wonder—in this temple of——" He shut his lips, for his neighbours were staring at him.

Corrance rose, muttering: "The expenses must be stupendous; but Miraflores shares are at 219. I bought a nice little block at 127 eighteen months ago."

"Shut up, you miserable materialist!"

"I can't afford to be anything else—nor can Mark, poor devil!"

"I beg your pardon," said Pynsent hurriedly.

They pushed their way through the crowd, pausing at the top of the broad stairs which led to the street below. The atmosphere, charged with odours of musk and patchouli and reeking of strong cigars, was overpoweringly oppressive. But on almost every face, pale beneath the glare of the electric light, flamed a

curious satisfaction, curious because with rare exceptions it was artificial. The exception may be mentioned. A thick-set man, remarkable by reason of his white hair and pink smooth face, stood at the entrance, bowing and beaming. The habitués knew him, and nodded carelessly as they passed by. Some exchanged a few words. The man seemed to be counting: reckoning the numbers present, computing gains.

”That’s old Harry,” said Corrance to the painter. ”He runs this place. Hullo, Harry, how are you? Big house to-night.”

”Big house every night,” said Harry complacently. ”You know that, Mr. Corrance. It’s prime—prime. I never get tired of watching it.”

He rubbed his plump white hands together, beaming like an aged cherub.

”Holy Moses!” exclaimed Pynsent. ”You never get tired of watching—this?” He indicated the promenade in a derisive gesture.

”Never,” said Harry, opening his blue eyes in childish astonishment at such a question. ”Why this is my show. I planned it. I stand here every night.”

”It’s meat and drink, old chap, isn’t it?” said Corrance.

”I’ve got just where I wanted to be,” Harry said solemnly. ”The boys call me king of the music-halls.”

”Good-night, your majesty,” said Corrance, beginning to descend the stairs. ”There’s one that’s happy and content,” he added, as Pynsent and he strolled down the corridor.

”We’re saprophytes,” burst out Pynsent.

”I don’t know what that means,” said Jim, ”but it sounds something nasty.”

CHAPTER XL
”COME!”

True to his promise, Corrance sought out the Bishop of Poplar, and delivered himself of his message. David Ross nodded, but his fine eyes were troubled.

”What’s happened to Mark?” said Corrance irritably. ”D——n it all—I beg your pardon, David, but Mark would make you swear, bishop though you are.”

”I’ll see him,” said David; ”but I—I don’t know—I fear——” He broke off abruptly. Then his eyes flashed. ”What’s happened to Mark?

”As for me,” said Jim, ”I can see, but Mark, the blind fool, wants a nurse or a keeper. He’s half child, half lunatic. I’ll go now. You’re up to your nose in work,

and so am I. I suppose you want money, you shameless beggar?"

"All I can get and all I can't get."

"I shall have to send you a cheque," Jim growled. "I tell everybody you're the dearest friend I've got. Good-bye."

He retreated hastily, fearing a lecture. David returned to an enormous correspondence with which his secretary was endeavouring to cope. The poor man nearly burst into tears when his chief told him that he might be absent for several hours. David put on his hat, deaf to a score of protests.

"I'm going fishing," he said, "and, confound it! I've no bait."

Corrance had told him that Mark lunched at the Scribblers. To that club the Bishop took his way. There he learned that Mark was writing in the silence room. David walked in, unannounced, holding out his hand, which Mark refused to take.

"You went to Betty," he said fiercely.

"No."

"She failed me."

"Yes; she failed you, thank God."

"What brings you here?"

"You know perfectly well."

"But this is intolerable, this interference! Will you understand, Ross, that I insist upon your leaving me alone?"

"That is impossible, Mark. Why, I want you to come and stay with me for a month."

"I wonder they ordained you a bishop," said Mark. "I thought they made a point of choosing men of—tact."

"I've any amount of tact," said David cheerfully. "Mark, you're a madman, and in your soul you know it."

"Tommy Greatorex sent you on this fool's errand?"

"Yes; Greatorex and Jim and Pynsent. Your friends love you well, Mark. Have you no love for them?"

"I'll tell you something, Ross; it may save you time and trouble. The love I had for you fellows is dead—dead." Then, as a gesture of dismay escaped the Bishop, Mark added: "I cannot love anybody. If it could come back, if—but it won't. That's why I've kept away from most of you. You—you all bore me. Oh, it's my fault, I know. I've become a one-idea'd man. I can think of nothing but my play and the woman who is going to produce it, to give it life. She's become part of it, do you understand, part of me—me. I can't lie to you; but I'd like you to try to realise that the Mark Samphire you once knew is dead. Who killed Cock Robin?" he laughed. "I can't answer that question."

"You mean you won't," said the Bishop steadily. "Well, I believe in the res-

urrection of the dead. You will come to life again, Mark Samphire, but not at my touch."

He moved towards the door.

"David!"

The familiar name thrilled upon the air. It was Mark, the old Mark, speaking. In an instant the hands of the two friends were locked.

"I can't let you go like that," said Mark. "For all you have done and would do, I—thank you."

A few days passed without incident. Spring was abroad in the fields and woods, hailed by twittering birds and white blossoms. Mark felt her caress, and was sensible of that amazing calm which succeeds and precedes any strenuous effort. He let himself drift with the current, lulled almost to sleep by the lilt of the stream which bore him to the troubled waters beyond his ken.

Someone has said that a fine quality in a human being may become the source of disaster as well as triumph. One might go further, and add that a fine quality denied its triumph, may be wrecked in disaster. That love for others with which Mark had been endowed would have increased and multiplied in marriage. The man had the best qualities or a husband and father. He apprehended this with his reason, even as Betty apprehended it intuitively. But such manifest destiny had been denied him, as in like manner it was denied to his friend David Ross. But David had been given his triumph. His power of loving, purged from the taint of selfish emotion, had expanded enormously, incredibly, suffusing itself, divinely fluid, over vast areas, transmuting everything it touched, producing and reproducing with inexhaustible energy and fertility. Mark's love might have flowed into as many and diverse channels had it not been dammed by its bastard brother passion—hate.

Now, standing (as Greatorex had put it) on the brink of the bottomless pit, he was conscious that not only was love, the higher love, dead, but that hate also was moribund. He could think of Archibald as of one at an immeasurable distance—a shadowy figure, a blur upon the horizon. And since his meeting with Betty in Pynsent's studio, she also had faded, and become *unreal*, a phantom of the past, flitting from him into impenetrable shades.

This feeling of remoteness from the persons whose lives had been so interwoven with his own underwent a crucial test that same afternoon. In the *Globe* Mark read that the see of Parham had been offered to and accepted by Archibald Samphire. His brother had reached the apex of his ambitions; he was the bishop-designate of a famous diocese in the North of England! Lower down, in the same column, was another paragraph—

”Mrs. Perowne is leaving London for the Continent. The famous actress, we are given to understand, has accepted a play by one of our rising novelists, a play which those who have read it declare to be quite out of the common.”

Mark recognised the finger of Tommy in this, as well as the long arm of coincidence. Upon the page opposite the column of personal paragraphs was a sketch of his brother’s life and labours. Mark laughed. The Bishop of Parham. A spiritual peer! And what a leg for a gaiter! He laughed again, reflecting that other paragraphs might be printed concerning a famous actress and a rising novelist. My lord would read them with horror.

Next day the *Times* had a long leader about the Chrysostom of Chelsea. The late Bishop of Parham, an old infirm man, had distinguished himself as scholar, and then extinguished himself as prelate, lacking those powers of organisation which do not, perhaps, lend themselves to biblical exegesis and the Higher Criticism. His diocese—of great extent—had of late years increased enormously in population. The discovery of coal and a certain kind of clay had brought about an upheaval: the pastoral industries, which supported a few farmers and shepherds, still flourished, but side by side with colossal commercial enterprises. Towns, black with the smoke from a thousand factories, had sprung up like mushrooms upon turf that had never known a plough; railroads ravaged the face of the landscape with indelible lines; half a dozen fishing villages bade fair to become seaports of importance. With these new and complex conditions, the aged scholar had tried in vain to cope. Upon his death, at an advanced age, it was felt at headquarters that a young man must be selected to grapple with them: an athlete of tried physical strength, an abstainer (for the statistics in regard to drunkenness were appalling), an organiser, and above all things an eloquent preacher. For such a task no better nor abler man than Archibald Samphire could be found in the kingdom. The Prime Minister had made a wise selection, which the Dean and Chapter of Parham would, doubtless, approve and confirm. *And so forth....*

Mark bought other journals and read what was written about Parham and its bishop-designate. In each a few lines were accorded to the wife, who, by happy chance, was descended from the most ancient and distinguished of the border families. One paper contained the following:—

”Our readers will learn with deep sympathy and regret that the health of the future *châtelaine* of Parham Castle is causing her husband and many friends grave anxiety.”

Mark sprang to his feet with an exclamation. Betty—ill! In an instant he felt his blood circulating violently, stinging him to wild and over-powering excitement. The bishop-designate of Parham remained an attenuated shade; his wife was clothed with palpable flesh and blood. Ill? She? Incredible!

He despatched a telegram to Dibdin, the butler, and waited for the answer, pacing up and down the Finchley Road, regardless of a shower which wetted him to the skin. While he waited, one of the telegraph boys who knew him came up with a despatch. Mark tore open the envelope. The telegram was from Sybil Perowne. She had reached Paris and was going to Fontainebleau. Mark stared stupidly at the message. Then he murmured between his teeth: "I wish she was going to Jericho."

The actress had become as remote as Betty had been a few hours before. Between Sybil Perowne and him stretched the long years of youth and childhood, never to be forgotten—the years which belonged to Betty. He went back to meet Betty in a thousand familiar places; she ran to meet him, her eyes radiant with pleasure, her lips parted in joyous acclamation.

An hour later Dibdin's answer came—

"Very ill indeed. Typhoid."

Mark went to Chelsea in the first hansom he saw. At his brother's house carriages were coming and going upon the straw which had been laid down. Dibdin gave details. His mistress had complained of headache and general *malaise* for some ten days, but had refused persistently to see her doctor. Finally, she had taken to her bed, ravaged by fever. She had eaten some oysters sent as a present to the preacher by an ardent admirer. Archibald also had eaten the oysters, but with impunity.

"Lady Randolph is upstairs, and master is in the library," said Dibdin. "Won't you see him, Mr. Mark?"

Mark hesitated.

"Yes," he said nervously, "I will. Show me in, Dibdin."

Archibald, who was writing at his desk, rose to receive him. As the door closed behind Dibdin, the eyes of the brothers met.

"If she asks for me, you will send?" said Mark, moving a step nearer.

"Go," Archibald replied, trembling and turning aside his eyes.

"Not till I have your promise. She may not ask, but if she does, by Heaven! you must, you shall send. Swear it!"

"Go, go!"

But Mark advanced, omnipotent by virtue of the passion within him.

Archibald retreated. Did he fear violence? Or did he read in his brother's

eyes a power of will against which he was helpless. Pale, shaken as by a palsy, he stammered out: "I w-w-will s-s-send."

"Swear it!"

"I swear it."

Mark went back into the hall. Dibdin mentioned, with a pride which at any other time would have tickled Mark's humour, that everybody in London wanted the latest news. He and George, the footman, were almost worn out answering inquiries. Princes of the blood, the House of Peers, the House of Commons, Royal Academicians, county families, had learned with infinite regret of Mrs. Samphire s dangerous illness. Mark listened with eager ears. And what did Dibdin himself think? Dibdin, like all of his class, was lamentably pessimistic. "In the hall, we entertain no hope, no hope," Dibdin murmured. "And to think of that beautiful castle at Parham without the mistress is breaking our hearts in two, sir."

A terrible ten days passed. At the beginning of the first week Mark received a letter from Mrs. Perowne. Between the lines of it an even more distracted vision than Mark's might have caught a glimpse of the Fury. Mark read it, wondering what charm he had perceived in her, and thankful that no links stronger than words bound him to the witch. He had asked no questions concerning Mrs. Perowne's past; and she had asked none concerning his. The postscript to her letter was very imperative: "Come to the woman you love, if you are alive." He replied simply: "The woman I loved as a boy and a man, the woman I love still, is dying. Think what you please of me, and forget me as soon as possible." By return of post came his play with a brutal line across the title page: "Take this to her; I have no use for it." Mark tossed the typescript into a drawer with a laugh. *Fenella*, the graven image of success which he had set up and worshipped, had become a thing of absolutely no importance. But he remembered the Chow and the spirits of ammonia. His dear love, who lay dying, had saved him from—what?

Meantime, his friends sought him out, but he sent away David, and Tommy Greatorex and Pynsent. Jim Corrance, however, refused to leave him, although Mark ignored his presence for twenty-four hours. Then, very gradually, he thawed into speech with his old friend. Together they awaited the bulletins. The disease was running its slow, tortuous course. One telegram spelt hope in capital letters; another—despair: each rose and fell with Betty's temperature. Mark's self-control distressed poor Jim unspeakably. His face, which had lost the expression of youth, always so captivating, wore an iron mask of impassivity. And yet Jim knew that the intermittences of Betty's fever imposed themselves on Mark.

We are told that Chinese malefactors condemned to die by the abominable torment of *Ling*—the death from a thousand cuts—only suffer up to a certain

point. Then insensibility dulls the knives of the executioners.

Jim was asking himself the question: ”Will Mark cease to feel?” when a telegram from Archibald reached Hampstead, containing one word, ”*Come*.”

CHAPTER XLI
THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE

Lady Randolph was awaiting Mark in the pretty drawing-room overlooking the river.

”Nothing can save her,” she whispered. ”She is alive because she could not die without seeing you. What is left is yours. You understand. Archibald has been generous.”

”Archibald has his son,” Mark said hoarsely.

”She was not herself till last night, when the fever burnt itself out. But, Mark, always, always she raved of you. Husband and child were never mentioned. It was terrible for him—poor fellow—terrible!”

Mark followed her upstairs.

Betty lay in bed, the light from the windows, which were opened wide, streaming upon her emaciated face. A clean, sweet perfume of violets filled the air, and whatever might have indicated a long and terrible illness had been removed.

She met his glance with a strange smile, as he stumbled forward, falling on his knees at the bedside, saying nothing, but kissing the hand lying limp upon the coverlet. Betty spoke first:

”Mark, Mark, Archie has forgiven you.”

Mark said nothing. His brother’s forgiveness came upon him at this moment as a meaningless blow on the cheek. What did he care for Archie’s forgiveness? But he understood instantly what it meant to Betty. It explained the smile with which she greeted him. The question in her eyes slowly burnt its way to his heart.

”And he has been so good to me, so—good,” she faltered.

”Yes, yes,” he said hastily. Should he lie to her as she lay dying? Should he swear, if need be, that he, too, was purged of hate and envy? Why not, if such empty words had any virtue in them for her? But the lie could not leave his lips. A minute or two passed in silence. Then she whispered: ”You will not leave me,

Mark?"

Again he kissed her fingers.

"I shall not leave you, dear, dear Betty."

"Ah, but I must leave you. And I'm afraid."

"If I could go too——Shall I? Would it make it easier?"

The life raging in him communicated itself to her. A faint colour flowed into her cheeks, her eyes sparkled.

"You would do that?"

"Gladly."

"I knew you would say it. But I am not afraid for myself. I am—afraid—for—you. And if—if you went with me, we should part on the other side."

The words dropped one by one from her pallid lips, slowly, faintly, yet with indescribable emphasis.

"You must—wait," she whispered. "Promise me that you will wait. Quick!"

He obeyed, awestruck, for she had closed her eyes, and he feared she was gone. After a pause she spoke of his sermon: "It is here—under—my—pillow. Will you read the last two pages to me?"

He consented reluctantly, obedient to some spiritual authority. At the sound of his broken, troubled voice, harsh, but vibrant with that strange arresting quality which always had thrilled her, she smiled and sighed. Mark read the manuscript, unable to recognise it as his own. But reading on, he leaped the years which had passed. The sermon closed with a passage of great beauty and power. When he finished, he said wonderingly: "Did I write that?"

Betty whispered: "You know now why I couldn't come."

Mark remembered his own aphorism: that the best work of men is greater than themselves. And, if so, the conclusion followed inevitably: this sermon, infinitely greater than himself, must have been inspired not from within, but from without—by the Infinite!

"It is getting very dark," said Betty.

"Yes," he replied.

The sun had not reached its zenith, but it was dark indeed for the speaker. Betty's breath came and went with difficulty, as the heart and lungs slowly failed. Mark raised her head. Her fingers felt for his hand. He perceived that she was making a sign on the back of it. At first he thought it was a caress, but the fingers traced the same sign again and again—a cross.

He wished to speak of love, but the dreadful lump filled his throat—strangling him. She was dying, slipping from his grasp. If he could have believed that a meeting was possible elsewhere, still the doleful certainty possessed him that the flesh-and-blood woman was departing for ever. Revolt raged within him, while her finger traced the symbol of the faith he had abjured, the symbol of the

love which vanquishes hate and death.

Suddenly the finger stopped.

As suddenly, something seemed to break in Mark's heart.

"Betty," he cried, "Betty—do you hear me? I am glad you didn't come. I shall live to thank God you didn't come."

She opened her eyes, and for the last time he noted that curious intensity of interrogation by which the full orb of the irid was revealed. He saw that she could not speak; he knew with conviction that no speech was necessary. Her lips parted in a faint smile, as if the last flickering doubt were escaping. Then, with a little shiver, with a sigh of contentment, her lids fell....

Outside the nurse and Lady Randolph waited, listening. In the library below sat Archibald Samphire and David Ross. Presently Lady Randolph went downstairs.

"The doors are locked," she faltered. "And there isn't a sound. I fear—I fear——"

The others understood instantly.

"Oh, my God—not that!" exclaimed Archibald.

He ran upstairs. At Betty's door he paused, inclining his ear. The silence within the room chilled him to the marrow. He called Mark by name, at first in a whisper, then louder, at the last his voice rang through the house.

"We must break in," he said.

At the first glance it seemed certain that both Mark and Betty lay dead on the bed. Even the trained eye of the nurse was deceived. But after a stimulant had been administered, Mark recovered semi-consciousness. When he opened his eyes he began to speak in his natural voice; then he laughed—gaily, youthfully.

"That's it, Betty—capital! Pop it over his head! Good! Ha—ha! old Archie, that did you. I say, I am thirsty...."

He imagined that he was at Pitt Hall playing lawn tennis.

Brain fever set in within twenty-four hours. During his delirium he called impatiently for his brother, who came trembling. Mark saw only the boy.

"Why have you stayed away so long?" he asked. "You're not going to leave me, old chap?"

"No, no," stammered Archibald.

"I say, it is jolly seeing you again."

He stretched out his lean, shrunken hand, which Archibald took. Presently Mark's vagabond wits wandered to Lord's Cricket Ground.

"Well played!" he screamed. "A boundary hit, by Jove! That's my brother,

you know, old Archie. Isn't he splendid? Isn't he a slogger? There he goes again. What a smite! Well played, Samphire major! Well played, sir—*well played*!"

The tears fell down Archibald's cheeks.

"He's been going on like that all night," whispered the nurse; then she added gently, "He seems to have a wonderful love for you, sir." She was another nurse, just called in, still ignorant of such gossip as circulated in the servants' quarters. Constrained to listen to hideous raving, to heartrending revelations, this delirium of love touched her to the core. She knew that the famous preacher's wife lay dead in the next room, and being a tender-hearted woman, strove to comfort him.

"I hear so much that is so shocking," she whispered. "Only the other day I was nursing a gentleman who cursed his brother, who—died cursing him! And after that, *this*—— It must be a comfort to you...."

For a fortnight the fever raged. During long hours each day the brothers were together, united by the mocking fiend of delirium. And during those hours Mark lived again his youth. Nothing seemed to be forgotten. But delirium achieved more than reproduction—revelation. Mark, like all healthy boys, had concealed his love for his brother. Of the nature and extent of that love the elder had formed no conception—till now, when its steady stream poured down in flood.

After the first shock of seeing his brother's senseless body, Archibald told himself (and had said as much to David Ross) that it would be well if Mark departed in peace out of a world wherein he had suffered cruelly. But David Ross shook his head.

"He will not die," he said, with conviction, albeit the two doctors in attendance held the contrary opinion.

And then, gradually, Archibald came to regard his brother's ravings as the shadows of an inestimable substance. Computing his gains, he discovered with poignant consternation, that his losses far outweighed them. His name was in men's mouths; he held power, wealth, health in the hollow of his hand. But was there one fellow-creature who truly loved him? Day after day, Mark's innumerable friends came to the door: Pynsent, confessing that he was unable to work from anxiety; Jim Corrance, haggard with sleeplessness; Greatorex, who seemed to spend his time on the doormat; Albert and Mary Batley. And besides these, humbler friends: waifs and strays, reclaimed drunkards, factory girls, who had read in the papers that the man who had been kind to them lay dying.

Always Archibald had obtained what he desired; but it never occurred to him that he desired mean things, or rather that the things so desired were mean in comparison with other things which he had ignored. None the less, the habit of seeking strenuously what he coveted remained. He realised, inexorably, that he coveted his brother's love. And if Mark died, that love once given so freely,

then changed into hate, and at last given back in awful mockery, would perish with him.

It is possible, of course, that David Ross cleared his vision. He told David the little which David did not know. In a moment of profound humiliation he professed himself willing to resign his see. David indicated other penance, not alien to Christian sense. In and around Parham, he pointed out, a transgressor might bow the neck beneath the yoke of a labour harder than any to be found even in convict establishments. That Archibald should question his fitness for the task assigned him convinced David of the magnitude of the change within him.

Upon the day, however, when the doctors agreed that the crisis of the disease was approaching, Archibald's misery reached its culminating point. Returning life meant sanity. Mark would awake from a sleep which had lasted forty-eight hours to the realisation of the past, or he would sink into the coma and collapse which precede dissolution.

After some discussion it was agreed that Mark's eyes, when they opened, should rest on a face dear and familiar to him, yet dissociated from the events which had succeeded Betty's marriage. Mrs. Corrance had come to town; she had helped to nurse Mark; she was staying in the house and could be summoned at any moment. Accordingly, when at length Mark Samphire returned from his wanderings, the first person he saw was his old friend, as she sat sewing at the foot of his bed. She smiled serenely, waiting for him to speak. None the less, he kept silence so long that her hand began to tremble. She was sure that he was conscious and that he must be thinking of Betty.

"Have I been ill?" he asked gravely.

She rose at once, bent over him, touched his hand, and murmured: "Very ill. Brain fever. Keep quiet."

She laid the tips of her fingers upon his eyelids, gently pressing them down. He let them fall, and asked no more questions. But later, after he had taken some food, he said with a smile: "Betty told me that I must wait."

Within twenty-four hours word went forth from those in authority that he would live; but to Archibald's recurrent question, one answer alone was possible. Mark had not spoken his brother's name. Archibald's anxiety became hourly more poignant. If a glimpse of love had been vouchsafed him, in order that he might realise that it lay for ever beyond his reach, then of all men he would reckon himself the most unhappy.

Mark did not break silence, when he learned that he was in his brother's house. David was allowed to visit him, but the bishop spoke only of the waifs from the slums around the mission, who had not forgotten an old friend.

"But Bagshot killed his wife," said Mark.

David changed the subject. When he said good-bye, Mark said curtly: ”I've been a beast to you, Davie. Is it all right?”

Ross repeated Mark's words to Archibald, who was waiting in the passage: ”I think it is all right,” said he. Then he added, pressing the other's hand: ”He is asking for pardon.”

That night the nurse who had come to him first, and who had tended him so skilfully, sat alone with him. Her perceptions had warned her that she was in a house where tragedy had been enacted. She knew that her patient had been found, stricken down upon the death-bed of his brother's wife, that the husband had held aloof at that most solemn hour.

Presently, as she was giving Mark some broth, he asked if he had raved in his delirium. Other questions followed. He learned of Archibald's presence at his bedside, of his ministrations. Incredulity melted into astonishment and then into an expression which the nurse could not define.

”You were never easy for a moment,” she concluded, ”unless your brother was with you.”

”And he——?”

”It gave him real comfort to wait on you, poor gentleman!”

”Thank you,” said Mark. ”Good night, nurse!”

Next morning he asked for a mirror, exclaiming, when he saw his face: ”What a scarecrow!” Later, he begged the doctor to allow him to send for a barber. For some years he had worn a beard, which, however closely clipped, had greatly altered him. When the man came, Mark ordered him to shave all hair from his face. This done, he called again for the mirror.

”Do you see much change?” he asked the nurse.

”I hardly recognise you.”

”Others will r-recognise me,” he said.

With his back to the light he looked the Mark who had ascended the pulpit at King's Charteris. His face was thin, pale, and hollow-cheeked. The fever had taken from him the flesh and colour which life in the open air had given him. Presently David Ross called and was admitted.

”Mark!”

He stood upon the threshold, staring. Mark smiled.

”Will you do me a favour?” he said, as the nurse slipped from the room. ”I have not seen,” he paused for a moment, nervously, ”m-m-my b-b-brother yet. Will you ask him to c-c-come to me?”

A year later Pynsent wrote to Jim Corrance from Parham Castle.

"Parham has gained far more than Literature has lost. Here, Mark is the power behind the throne. *À propos*, I have painted Archibald on his throne in the sanctuary of Parham Cathedral. Everything, however, is subordinated to the face, upon which a ray of light falls obliquely. The expression you will hardly recognise, till you come here. When it was done, Archibald stared at it for many minutes. Then he said in his rather heavy way: 'It's a portrait; you have looked beneath these.' He indicated the robes. *The man looks years older.* But Mark has got back his youthful appearance, his high spirits, his keenness, his power of getting enjoyment out of what most of us would consider tedious and disagreeable. As his brother's secretary and confidential adviser, he knows that he has found himself. Archibald reaps all the honour and glory: and the sheaves are heavy. If praise, as Keble says, be our penance here, the Bishop of Parham will wear a hair shirt till he dies. He tells everybody, with pathetic earnestness, that his brother is the senior partner in the firm—and, of course, nobody believes him. Mark sticks to his red tie, and hunts once a week with Kirtling's hounds. He stammers worse than ever when he gets excited. It may seem amazing to you—it is certainly amazing to me—but Mark has the look of a happy, healthy man; and his nephew, so curiously like Betty, adores him."

Jim showed this letter to his mother.

"All the same," he remarked; "Mark ought to have married Betty. I am sure of that."

Mrs. Corrance laid down her embroidery. She and Jim were keeping house together: it being agreed that the winter should be spent in town and the summer in the country.

"I am not sure," she answered slowly. "I used to pray that Betty would marry you, but how many have profited by my 'losing of my prayers'? David Ross might make a guess."

Jim flushed. Only his mother knew that he had contributed large sums of money and much time to the Bishop of Poplar's East End enterprises.

"My dear son," Mrs. Corrance touched his hand with her delicate fingers, "try to believe that Betty died in order that the three men who loved her might live."

THE END

PLYMOUTH

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